

INTERVIEW OF FELIPE Q. ATALIG

by Howard P. Willens and Deanne C. Siemer

November 15, 1993

- Willens: Felipe Q. Atalig was a member of the Congress of Micronesia for several years. He was a delegate to the Constitutional Convention in 1976. He served subsequently in political office, and he has been kind enough to agree to be interviewed. Felipe, could I start by asking you to give a little background information about where you grew up and where you were educated.
- Atalig: Yes. I am originally from Rota. After attending the intermediate school here in Saipan, I basically stayed here in Saipan and finished my high school here. Then shortly after that I went to PICS, that's in Truk, and finished my high school there.
- Willens: PICS is the Pacific . . .
- Atalig: Islands Central School.
- Willens: Is that a high school or is that a post-high school institution?
- Atalig: That's a high school for the Trust Territory, and I'm sure you know what islands are in the Trust Territory. And also I attended Evergreen State College in Washington State, where I graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in political science.
- Willens: What year did you get your degree?
- Atalig: I got my degree in 1976. What I did is that I documented my experience through all my years of Congress [of Micronesia] experience and this documentation was reviewed by the Board of Regents of the Evergreen State College. On the basis of my experiences, they afforded me credits, so I was very fortunate to spend only one year and a half before graduating with a Bachelor of Science degree at the Evergreen State College.
- Willens: What years were you there in the State of Washington?
- Atalig: I spent my years there from late 1974 (or early 1975) to early 1976.
- Willens: After you went to the PICS, correct?
- Atalig: Yes.
- Willens: Did you then return to Saipan?
- Atalig: Yes, I did return to Saipan. After that I got actively involved with the political parties here in Saipan. Those were the Popular Party and the Territorial Party, which are now the Democratic Party and the Republican Party.
- Willens: Do you remember approximately what year you came back to Saipan?
- Atalig: It's been a long time, but maybe around the early 1970's.
- Willens: Let me help you out a little bit, because I've seen some of these materials. You ran for the Congress of Micronesia for the first time, I believe, in 1970.
- Atalig: Yes.
- Willens: So had you been back for a year or two before you ran for the Congress?

Atalig: Yes, I was back then. I also served at the District Legislature, that's the local legislature, where I gained the confidence of the party leaders. I was able to convince them to elevate me up to the Congress of Micronesia.

Willens: Just to go back to your parents for a moment, were they both native Rotanese?

Atalig: No. My mother's mother is originally from the island of Martaluk in Truk, but my father is a real Rotanese. So, I am half-Carolinian by descent. All of my mother's brothers and sisters were also Carolinian.

Willens: They're Carolinian?

Atalig: Yes.

Willens: I have some indication in the documents that you became active in something called the Reunification Committee in about 1969, which was a group of Saipan political leaders who were trying to bring about reunification with Guam. Do you remember participating in that activity?

Atalig: Very actively, because that was the basic position taken by the Popular Party, endorsed by the Party, and pushed through the Legislature comprised heavily of Popular Party leaders.

Willens: Who were the other active political leaders in the Popular Party at the time, in addition to say Ben Santos?

Atalig: Well, many of them have passed away now. There was the ladies association that pushed so heavily to have the unification with Guam.

Willens: You said the women were particularly active in that effort?

Atalig: Very active in this effort. That's how it became so strong, because it was endorsed by the women of the Popular Party at that time.

Willens: Did the women have a particularly strong influence in politics here in the Marianas?

Atalig: In those days they were so active and played a great role. Without their endorsement you could never become a candidate. I was very fortunate that, through the women's association, I managed to get into politics.

Willens: When did you first become interested in the question of the future political status for the Mariana Islands?

Atalig: During those years of struggle for our people in the Northern Marianas, they compared their lives with those living in Guam. They were very much convinced by the lifestyle in Guam, at least in terms of dollars. In those days, to begin with, I was being paid 20 cents an hour.

Willens: In what job were you paid 20 cents an hour?

Atalig: I was still a student and worked at Rota. The present mayor, Prudencio T. Manglona, was an administrator. So I held a position as a clerk-student during the summer.

Willens: Which Manglona was the administrator?

Atalig: Prudencio T. Manglona, the present mayor.

Willens: The present mayor?

Atalig: Yes.

Willens: Was it particularly the greater economic development of Guam that was the attraction for

the Marianas, or were there other considerations that persuaded you and the other leaders that you wanted some different status?

Atalig: It was basically the geographic and family ties. We are closer in terms of cultural identity compared with the other districts within Micronesia and, for that reason, on this issue of unification we were very strong. It has to do with the economic ties and the family ties that most of our people have, one way or the other, with relatives on Guam. And it was so difficult to enter Guam at that time. After thirty days, you had to exit from Guam.

Willens: I have heard some people say that there was a strong desire to become U.S. citizens and what seemed to be the quickest way to accomplish that objective was to reintegrate with Guam. Would you agree with that?

Atalig: Not really, because during the plebiscites that we had I was not with the “pro” side.

Willens: You were not what?

Atalig: This did not relate to the unification with Guam, but to change the status to what we have now. I did not originally support permanent association with the United States. I think what brought about this change of status was the issue of unification, when Guam rejected reunification with the Northern Marianas.

Willens: Now Guam had this plebiscite in 1969 and they voted down reunification with the Northern Marianas. Do you have any judgment as to why the vote came out that way?

Atalig: I really don't know. The speculation was that there was a fear among the people of Guam that somehow they felt that they are more far advanced economically, and in other aspects of their lives, that to associate with the Northern Marianas would only add to their existing problems.

Willens: What was the reaction here in the Northern Marianas after Guam turned down the possibility of reunification? Did that change the objectives of the Popular Party leadership?

Atalig: Yes. Immediately that changed not only the Popular Party but the majority of the people of the Northern Marianas, who were hurt by this rejection by the people of Guam.

Willens: Now the Territorial Party always wanted to go in a somewhat different direction. Was that the principal difference between the two parties at the time?

Atalig: Yes. The Popular Party had established the position of unification and the Territorial Party wanted to have a direct annexation with the United States. So, with the defeat of the unification issues, the leaders gathered and analyzed what were the main causes of such a rejection. They finally concluded that perhaps the present status, which we are now enjoying, is the goal of the Northern Marianas.

Willens: You indicated that you have some relationship to the Carolinian minority in the islands and you were educated in Truk for a few years. Did you personally feel any sense of unity with the Micronesians from the other districts?

Atalig: Yes. As a matter of fact, many of the past members of the Congress of Micronesia are my family. We considered them to be relatives. Like for example, Andon Amaraich. By the advice of my uncle from Tanapag, Zanu Reta, I was told that Andon Amaraich was one of the closest relatives that we have. As you may know, Andon Amaraich was one of the greatest leaders in Micronesia. So, you know, the feeling of closeness toward your own clans is always there. That's how I have these ties at times and in return they do have some sympathy too on my part. At times when I introduced measures or resolutions, they were

much more lenient toward adopting any measures or resolutions I proposed than other members of the Congress of Micronesia from the CNMI.

Willens: How old were you when you first ran for the Congress of Micronesia in 1970?

Atalig: In 1970, maybe I was just twenty years old.

Willens: Twenty years old?

Atalig: Yes.

Willens: Did you have any views at the time about the TTPI and, in particular, the successes or failures of the administering authority here?

Atalig: Yes. Everybody was looking toward a different political status. They were seeking more advancement in terms of their life and much more appropriate to the environment that would benefit the entire people of the Northern Marianas.

Willens: I've heard from some sources that the leaders in the other districts would be perfectly content to have stayed with the status quo under the Trusteeship for five or 10 more years, and it turned out that way. But that the leaders here in the Marianas seemed to be particularly anxious to get out from under the Trust Territory Administration. What was your view?

Atalig: I supported the views of the Northern Marianas to get out as soon as possible. There were always feelings of conflict among the representatives from the Northern Marianas and the other districts. In terms of the funds, distributions, we always got less priority in comparison with the other districts, simply because the Northern Marianas were more advanced in terms of infrastructure. So that feeling really became very strong, the Northern Marianas being the largest revenue contributor to the Micronesian Congress. And that feeling about the distribution of the funds continued to grow. The leadership of the Northern Marianas instructed us to pursue this issue and represent the views of the Northern Marianas in the Congress.

Willens: There came a time when the Congress of Micronesia adopted what were known as the Four Principles and rejected the so-called Commonwealth Proposal that the United States presented to the Congress of Micronesia. Were you involved in any of the discussion that led to those actions?

Atalig: No, I was not. Actually the status issue was addressed by a committee that was selected and appointed by the Congress and also by the officials of the CNMI. So unfortunately I was not involved in the actions relative to this particular matter.

Willens: You are speaking about the Joint Committee and the fact that Herman Q. Guerrero and Ed Pangelinan were designated to serve on that Joint Committee?

Atalig: Yes. They were the official representatives who represented the views of the Northern Marianas.

Willens: It's my understanding that they would meet frequently with the political leadership back here in the Marianas and report what was going on. Did you participate in those sessions?

Atalig: Any sessions or any report called for by these two official representatives, we are compelled to attend and participate in any discussions. So, I was very active in discussing the future status of the Northern Marianas.

Willens: In early 1971, the Popular Party leadership here began to be very outspoken with respect

to the Congress of Micronesia and the Trust Territory Administration. One of the events that resulted from that was the burning of Congressional facilities here on Saipan. Do you remember that incident?

Atalig: Yes, very vividly. As a matter of fact, I was still at my house when representative Herman Guerrero came over to my house and told me that the Congress building was burned. So immediately we were called to meet with Ed Pangelinan, Herman Guerrero, Carl Shoda and myself to discuss what will be the best approach that we can take with respect to our people. Actually, the goal was to maintain calmness. Everyone among the leadership recognized that the burning of the Congress was not great.

Willens: It was generally suspected that somebody associated with the Popular Party had done this?

Atalig: Apparently that was not correct, because the Popular Party is the one that has more sympathy for the other districts. The assumption may not be correct. Up to now nobody ever found out who did that, but it really reflected the sentiment of the public that they wanted to be out from the rest of the Trust Territory.

Willens: Was it a taxation issue or revenue sharing issue that precipitated the kind of divisiveness that you remember?

Atalig: Basically, revenue sharing was one of the major dissatisfactions registered by our people. As I stated earlier, it simply was not fair when the Northern Marianas contributed most of the revenue to the central funds for the Micronesians. These feelings of unfairness in terms of revenue sharing grew, and it became very much of a concern and a problem to the Northern Marianas.

Willens: How did it happen that you became associated with the Popular Party rather than the Territorial Party which, at the time, seemed to have the most Carolinian representation?

Atalig: Well, my late father-in-law, the late Judge Ignacio Benevente, was one of the founders of the Popular Party and a very well-respected man.

Willens: This is your deceased father-in-law?

Atalig: Yes, father-in-law, the late Judge Ignacio Benevente. My recognition within the Party is attributed mainly to the Benevente family, one of the very distinguished and respected families here in the Northern Marianas. So my involvement with the Popular Party was largely through the role of my late father-in-law's contribution to the Party. I became very successful in associating with the leaders and my identification with the Benevente family gave me more strength and recognition within the Party. Otherwise, being from Rota, it would be very difficult for me to come in and win any election in the Northern Marianas. As a matter of fact, during those days I was the only person from Rota or any island other than Saipan that came to run in Saipan and won the election.

Willens: The only person from Rota who moved to Saipan and actually ran here and won an election.

Atalig: Yes.

Willens: How many terms had you served in the District Legislature before you ran for the Congress?

Atalig: I served almost four terms.

Willens: Four terms?

- Atalig: Four terms, I believe. And I served two terms in the Congress of Micronesia.
- Willens: That was from 1970 to 74?
- Atalig: Maybe so, I'm not very sure now.
- Willens: Those were two-year terms?
- Atalig: Yes.
- Willens: After the burning of the Congress of Micronesia facilities, is it your recollection that the principal goal of the Popular Party leadership was to keep people calm and not stimulate any more controversy?
- Atalig: That was actually the position taken by the Saipan delegation to the Congress of Micronesia. We immediately took that position and met with other local level officials and that position was sanctioned and endorsed by all.
- Willens: Did you have any dealings with Mr. John Dorrance during these years?
- Atalig: I don't recall if I did have any dealings with Mr. John Dorrance.
- Willens: You remember who he was. He was the liaison officer who reported back to Washington what was going on out here. He was succeeded then by Mary Vance Trent. Do those names strike a bell?
- Atalig: Yes. The names sound familiar, but I don't recall associating directly with these people.
- Willens: In the spring of 1971, the Congress of Micronesia moved its location from Saipan to Truk and the Marianas delegation decided to have a what was called a boycott. But you went to Truk on the normal schedule and you were not accompanied by the other members of the delegation. I see you smiling. What do you remember about that particular colorful incident?
- Atalig: It's very exciting because I was accorded really all kinds of VIP treatment. In the first place, I did not participate in the boycott to the Congress of Micronesia.
- Willens: Why was there a boycott, and why did you decide not to participate in it?
- Atalig: Actually the main reason was to show the discontentment with the Congress for not giving in to the position of the Northern Marianas, which desired to move out from the rest of the Trust Territory.
- Willens: That was the purpose of the Marianas leadership, to show their dissatisfaction with the Congress?
- Atalig: That's correct. But my view at that time was that it was not correct and proper to show that kind of behavior by not participating in the Congress of Micronesia, by boycotting it. I feel that it is more appropriate to go over and discuss what really was the problem with that. I went ahead on my own, and boy that was really the experience I had in life. Upon my return I was called all kind of names. I was guarded for almost one week at my house.
- Willens: You were guarded?
- Atalig: Yes, through the Department of Public Safety.
- Willens: Because you had taken a different position from the leadership?
- Atalig: Yes. I was even named at that time, Benedict Arnold, for betraying the people of the Northern Marianas. Also very interestingly was how I was sent to Truk. I was put in by

the forklift at Guam while Eddie and Herman were watching from one side to the other side at the airport where I was boarding the airplane. So nobody actually knew how I was boarded but I was put in the cargo with the Continental forklift.

Willens: Forklift to the plane?

Atalig: Yes. The forklift . . .

Willens: The forklift lifts the cargo up to the plane?

Atalig: Yes, so that's how I was transferred to the plane.

Willens: That's how you got from Guam to Truk?

Atalig: No, no, no. I boarded the plane at Guam so the other delegation followed me from Saipan to Guam.

Willens: Had you told them that you were going to go onto Truk?

Atalig: I did not tell them, but the news spread that Felipe was going to attend . . .

Willens: So they followed you to Guam?

Atalig: They followed me to Guam, and then I boarded the forklift to take me directly to the airplane.

Willens: In the cargo?

Atalig: That's correct.

Willens: And you went to Truk then from Guam.

Atalig: I took the plane from Guam to Truk.

Willens: But you didn't sit in the cargo area?

Atalig: No, no, no. They just put me from the forklift so that I didn't have to go through the regular passenger screening.

Willens: Did Pangelinan and Guerrero ever see you get on the plane?

Atalig: Only when I was off loading from the forklift box. So they said: "God damn that guy. We better not let him run in the next election."

Willens: They followed you to Truk a few days later, is that correct?

Atalig: That's correct.

Willens: So the boycott was, on the whole, a big bust?

Atalig: Yeah, a big, big, big bust.

Willens: You say you were treated well when you arrived in Truk?

Atalig: Simply because Truk is considered also as my home, and the leaders of the Congress were so cordial at that time, very friendly. So I was treated very nicely.

Willens: Ambassador Williams was appointed in about March of 1971. When do you remember meeting him for the first time? Let me just try to refresh your recollection. He paid a visit out here in the summer of 1971. It would have been after the Congressional session. But there were no official sessions or negotiations of any kind until the following year. Do you have any recollection of that happening?

Atalig: I do remember the Ambassador and many meetings with the Political Status Commission of the Northern Marianas.

Willens: Did you participate in the discussions involving Ed Pangelinan and Herman Q. Guerrero as to when to actually request the United States to agree to separate negotiations?

Atalig: I never participated in any of their direct meetings with the Ambassador. But I did participate in any briefings made by Herman and Eddie.

Willens: There is some indication in the documents that the United States for a long time tried to persuade the Marianas to work within the Joint Committee and see if there could be some common status that would be acceptable to all the districts. What do you think changed the United States' point of view on that question?

Atalig: Well, the people of the Northern Marianas have long expressed their very strong desire for their political status. So for many, many years the position has already been known that the Northern Marianas want to have a permanent association with the United States. That was through many resolutions and other positions adopted by the legislature. Actually some of those were not favorable to the rest of the districts in Micronesia. The Northern Marianas were so strong in pursuing one goal, the goal that has been duly, officially expressed by the people of the Northern Marianas to their leaders, and that was permanent association with the United States.

Willens: But the United States knew that was the Marianas desire for many, many years. They agreed to separate negotiations in April 1972 at a meeting of the Joint Committee in Palau. What do you think ultimately persuaded the United States that they ought to agree to separate negotiations?

Atalig: True, once the Legislature adopted a resolution requesting the USSR to annex the Northern Marianas. Basically the people were tired already with resolution after resolution asking the United States. The United States had ignored the aspirations of the people of the Northern Marianas. It was at one point when the Legislature adopted a resolution inviting the USSR to annex the Northern Marianas. I believe that was when the United States started looking into this seriously. Otherwise there was no actual seriousness of any dialogue or communication established between the Northern Marianas and the office of Ambassador Williams.

Willens: Did you have confidence at the time in the early 1970's that the people of the Northern Marianas were capable of self-government?

Atalig: I always had the feeling that the people of the Northern Marianas, or anywhere in Micronesia, are just as capable as any American. But the Administration during those days still entertained the idea that we are not capable of administering ourselves. But that was proving to be not correct. I was very confident that we are capable of administering our own affairs. The only problem was that much red tape and other obstacles were hindering our opportunity to prove that we are capable to administer our own affairs.

Willens: What do you recall being the position of the Trust Territory government here toward the Marianas desire for separate negotiations? Were they against it, were they for it, or were they neutral on the subject?

Atalig: I believe they were more against it, because they didn't want to have a fragmentation of the districts here.

Willens: Why not? Why did they care one way or the other?

Atalig: You know, that was the position taken by some of their advisers—that to fragmentize the districts during those days would create more problems in terms of their political status.

- So, that was the main reason why the Trust Territory government was very strong in objecting to the fragmentation of these districts.
- Willens: Do you think that the Trust Territory government here cooperated with Ambassador Williams in his efforts?
- Atalig: I don't think so, because Williams was here really with the goal to listen and get the views of the people regarding their political aspirations. The Trust Territory Administration was very silent in terms of their support and other assistance that can be given to the Ambassador.
- Willens: Do you have any view as to what District Administrator Frank Ada thought about the separate administration?
- Atalig: Maybe at that time, if I'm not mistaken, Mr. Ada was in favor of the position of the Trust Territory government.
- Willens: Was he viewed by you as more of a representative of the Trust Territory government than he was as a local political leader?
- Atalig: Definitely, and that's why he's not very popular.
- Willens: Well, he ultimately ran as Lieutenant Governor, is that correct?
- Atalig: Yes, but that's why many people are not in agreement with many of his policies during his term as an administrator. [There were] views by many people of the Northern Marianas that basically he is just a representative from the Trust Territory government.
- Willens: Can you think of any example or two of local decisions that you think were not fully reflective of the desires of the local people?
- Atalig: Perhaps the homesteading programs. Many of the lands that actually need to be reserved for the local people. Like the Jones cattle ranch in Tinian. Many people rejected that idea. But because Jones has got the money and he has a good association with the Trust Territory government, even with the objection raised by the people of Tinian, those lands were set aside in the granting of the grazing land for cattle for Jones in Tinian. Many people believed that during those days Mr. Ada was leaning more closely with the Trust Territory government than protecting the interests of the Northern Marianas.
- Willens: Did you have any role to play in the legislation creating the Marianas Political Status Commission or the appointment of its members?
- Atalig: Yes.
- Willens: What do you recall about any issues that were debated at the time about creating such a Commission?
- Atalig: Actually, everybody was in support of that because it was long overdue. Such a Commission should have been established a long time ago in order that the issues of the status could be immediately addressed. So, without much debate on that, the Commission was wholeheartedly supported by the members of the Legislature.
- Willens: There were some public hearings on the proposed legislation and there is some indication that you participated in one of them. Do you recall any issues being raised about the size of the Commission or its representative nature?
- Atalig: Yes. Some concerns were raised that the Commission was too big. The financing of the Commission in order that they can adequately be representing their views to Washington was also one of the major issues and concerns raised during those days.

- Willens: Only \$25,000 was appropriated for its initial operation, and then there was some discussion that that was not an adequate sum.
- Atalig: No. The amount of money appropriated for the Commission was very, very, very minimal, and it was not even enough to hire a consultant or any legal counsel to direct the Commission. So that was one of the major concerns and obstacles in expediting the functions of the Commission.
- Willens: As it developed, the Commission was very heavily dominated by Popular Party political leaders, including those from the District Legislature and from the Saipan Municipal Council and so forth. There were special slots for the Territorial Party, for the Carolinian community, and for the business community. Did you agree that there should be such special slots for those particular interests?
- Atalig: Yes, I did, because this actually represents all the segments of the population of the Northern Marianas. You give an opportunity to have the minority also be represented in order that they can express their own views within this particularly important Commission.
- Willens: Did you think that was adequate representation for those particular points of view?
- Atalig: I feel in those days it was adequate. But the Party during those days was very strong. Whether there was such sentiment [by minorities] raised [or not], if the Party takes a position, then regardless of whether it was adequate or inadequate, it is final. What is being sanctioned and adopted by the Party, that's official.
- Willens: Maybe I have asked you this question before, who were the powerful decision-makers in the Party at the time?
- Atalig: Ben Santos. I considered him to be a very powerful leader during those days because what he said and presented to the Party was hardly ever being denied or rejected.
- Willens: Some of the other names that are reflected in the documents are Felipe Salas, Ben Camacho, Herman Q. Guerrero.
- Atalig: No, I don't consider any one of them as influential within the party other than Ben, because Ben Santos had been a very strong association with the ladies of the Popular Party. So those names that you mentioned are, it was just like Felipe Atalig. But Vicente Santos was a name that for many years has been treasured and been respected by the Party. He structured the Party in a way that any candidates they bring up, regardless of your qualifications or nature of your race, are not likely to be defeated.
- Willens: A couple of years later, to jump ahead, because I just read some documents about it, he was accused of embezzling some \$35,000 from the District Legislature. I don't recall at the moment how ultimately that was resolved. Do you think charges of that kind tainted his reputation and hurt his effectiveness?
- Atalig: There were charges raised against him, but his effectiveness to lead and run the legislature as well as his image to the party were not affected at all. Because you know, during those days regardless of what you say about Ben Santos, they won't pay attention. So it was really done on purpose maybe just to taint his name, because Ben was so popular and very powerful. I also have a deep respect because he was the one that encouraged me to run for the Congress of Micronesia. And through his endorsement, I found almost no opposition within the Popular Party.
- Willens: As I recall, there were five members of the Marianas delegation, two Senators and three Congressmen?

- Atalig: That's right.
- Willens: Were you running for the seat that involved Tinian and Rota?
- Atalig: Tinian and Rota.
- Willens: And part of Saipan?
- Atalig: Yes.
- Willens: I see. So you did have special responsibilities to represent the interests of the citizens of those two other islands?
- Atalig: Yes.
- Willens: There came a time in May of 1973 when the United States for the first time laid out its full request for Tinian. As you undoubtedly remember, it was for the entire island and then they were going to lease back one-third to the civilians. Information of this kind of detail had not previously been made available to the Marianas Political Status Commission or the public at large. How did you first hear about the dimensions of that request for land on Tinian?
- Atalig: Being a member of the Congress of Micronesia during that time, I was very, very instrumental in appropriating a certain amount of money given to the municipality of Tinian to undertake studies abroad in terms of the military impact that was being considered.
- Willens: You were part of a team that went abroad to the Philippines and elsewhere in or about April or May of 1973.
- Atalig: Yes.
- Willens: Had you decided to do that then with Congress of Micronesia funds before you knew exactly what the details were of the United States' request?
- Atalig: Yes, the Congress of Micronesia delegated the full authority to the mayor of Tinian for disbursement of the funds. So it was decided, through the Tinian Municipal Council along with the mayor, that the trip was necessary to be undertaken by some members of the Council and members of the Congress of Micronesia—that was me—to study some of the military impacts on other areas like the Philippines. We also went to Taipei and other areas where U.S. military forces are.
- Willens: How long was the trip?
- Atalig: The trip, if I'm not mistaken, was about two weeks.
- Willens: Did you get the cooperation from U.S. officials in the places that you went?
- Atalig: You know, fortunately, I am very surprised that during those days the Congress of Micronesia was given more respect than the present Congress whenever they take a trip. All of our trips have been secured and well-established. The schedules were all made in advance so that, upon arrival in a certain particular place, the U.S. Embassy of that particular country is alerted. When we went to Taipei, we were met by the U.S. Embassy. That was the time when Mr. Craley was still here.
- Willens: Neiman Craley.
- Atalig: That's correct. So actually all of our trips were prepared by Neiman Craley. During those days there was a lot of respect and admiration of the Congress of Micronesia's role. It

went to such an extent that, even if the airplane is full, there is always a tendency that the congressman should be given first priority in traveling.

Willens: What were the conclusions that you reached based on the investigation that you conducted on this trip?

Atalig: We submitted all the reports to the mayor. The mayor recommended to the Council that it was favorable to establish, or to approve, the U.S. military coming to the island of Tinian. So that was the position the delegation from Tinian had taken. I did not make the report. However, I was invited to travel together with them.

Willens: During the earlier months in 1973, there were many public statements made by the mayor, Joe Cruz, and others that were very affirmative about welcoming the U.S. military back to the island of Tinian. What do you think was the true sentiment of the people on the island of Tinian in 1973 with respect to the return of the military?

Atalig: Joe Cruz was a great leader. No question about that. His voice, during those days, was very articulate. People listened and respected him simply because Joe is also one of the very respected and very smart leaders. People thought he knows what he is talking about when he said that he welcomed the United States one hundred percent. There was no resistance toward the position of the mayor, or Cruz, in those days to an opening of the island of Tinian one hundred percent for the military.

Willens: The documents seemed to suggest that the people on Tinian had not enjoyed some of the economic development that the people on Saipan had, and they were ready for any kind of development that might offer them somewhat more promise of a better life. What is your recollection?

Atalig: As a matter of fact, that was the issue that Cruz was putting out—that better life is to be with the U.S. and the military. I don't know if I ever recalled that Cruz's position was being rejected by the people of Tinian but, like what I said, Joe Cruz was one of the greatest leaders in Tinian then. The people of Tinian highly regarded and respected him.

Willens: When the United States request though became public, the newspapers at least reported a very substantial change in sentiment on Tinian. The newspapers reported that, at that stage, the leaders, including Joe Cruz and the mayor, said that we might welcome the U.S. military here but we don't want to relocate the village, we don't want to give the military the whole island, and they took a very strong public position against the U.S. request. Do you recall making statements along that line yourself?

Atalig: No. The issue there was basically the two-thirds, like you mentioned, that the military is going to retain and their relocation of the present village to the other side in Tinian.

Willens: Did you have a view as to whether relocation of the village would be good for the people?

Atalig: The military said it is good because they will be provided with complete facilities and other compensation, but the people themselves did not apparently buy the views of the United States. They preferred to be where they are now rather than to be relocated.

Willens: After the newspaper broke the story as to the U.S. request, the Marianas Political Status Commission went over for an evening meeting with the people of Tinian and then, a week or so later, Ambassador Williams and his staff went over for a seven hour meeting on a Friday night to explain the U.S. position. Were you present at either of those meetings?

Atalig: No, I was not.

- Willens: Was the Congress in session then, or you were just not there?
- Atalig: No. I was not invited or informed.
- Willens: Did you hear any reports as to the success that Ambassador Williams had or did not have in explaining the U.S. position?
- Atalig: No, I don't get much informed on those issues during those meetings that I had, simply because I was never involved in their meetings. So, what success, I was not aware of.
- Willens: The Tinian representatives on the Marianas Political Status Commission at the beginning were Frank Hocog and Herman Manglona. Each was subsequently replaced, when they retired, and Joe Cruz went on the Commission with Bernard Hofschneider. Do you know Bernard Hofschneider?
- Atalig: Yes, I do. We served for two terms at the District Legislature.
- Willens: What was your assessment of his ability as a political leader?
- Atalig: No question, he is a very, very smart guy, but Bernard is not very much of a politician-style.
- Willens: As a politician-style?
- Atalig: Yes. He's too honest and not very much convincing in terms of selling what he has to sell to the public. He's not like Joe Cruz, that even if the issue is not good or correct, Joe has the capability and charisma to sell his goods to the public. But the problem with Bernard was that he is a very honest and very quiet person.
- Willens: After the session of negotiations in May and June of 1973, there was a Joint Communique issued that outlined generally the broad outlines of a future political status. Do you recall having any reaction to the direction that the Commission was taking?
- Atalig: I think that the Commission's position was overwhelmingly supported by the leaders and also, based upon the village meetings, it got favorable acceptance at the village level. So that was a very quick acceptance by the people because of the leaders' position. They accepted the Commission's report so, with that, there was little opposition raised.
- Willens: During the summer of 1973, the Joint Committee chaired by Senator Sali, held hearings in the Northern Marianas. There were hearings on Rota, on Tinian, and several meetings on Saipan with various political and civic groups. Did you attend any of those hearings that were conducted by the Joint Committee with the claimed purpose of trying to find out what the people really wanted with respect to their future political status?
- Atalig: Yes, I did participate in one or two meetings conducted by the late Sali. But it was predetermined already that during these village meetings the position of the Northern Marianas was to be represented in terms of their political aspirations. So, regardless of the political issues raised by Sali's committee, the people of the Northern Marianas already knew what they want for their status.
- Willens: Well, Sali subsequently filed a report with the Congress of Micronesia saying that there were many people in the Northern Marianas who were not committed to a commonwealth relationship with the United States. In fact, there were separate meetings with the Carolinian Association and with the general public at which there were some people who criticized the direction of the Marianas Political Status Commission. Do you believe that was a minority view?
- Atalig: Definitely, that was a minority view. Because if it were a majority view, the present status as what we are in now would not be adopted and approved.

- Willens: Many of these hearings generated complaints by the Marianas leadership, particularly in the District Legislature and in the Municipal Council, asking the Congress of Micronesia to stay out of the Marianas business. The Congress of Micronesia had passed a resolution by this time, I believe, saying that the Joint Committee had the sole authority to negotiate for all of Micronesia. Do you remember a debate in the Congress of Micronesia on that particular resolution?
- Atalig: I vigorously opposed the passage of this resolution, simply because I felt that the people of the Northern Marianas should be given their own rights and the Congress should recognize the desire of the people of the Northern Marianas. We never at any time during the history of the Congress of Micronesia had any identical or similarity in terms of our political aspirations. The passage of this resolution that the Congress of Micronesia had the sole authority to negotiate antagonized the people here. They just don't want to have anything to do with the Congress of Micronesia.
- Willens: Why do you think the Congress of Micronesia and Chairman Salii, in particular, thought that passing such a resolution would be useful?
- Atalig: Simply because they felt that it was to their advantage. They are in power. The passage of that resolution by the Congress would give them more power to negotiate on behalf of the people of the Northern Marianas or the people of Micronesia. That created a lot of problems here.
- Willens: It so happened that the United Nations Visiting Mission was here on the island of Saipan when that resolution was being debated in the Senate of the Congress of Micronesia. Did you happen to participate in any meetings with that 1973 U.N. Visiting Mission?
- Atalig: I was there, but the ability of people to talk to the U.N. representatives was so limited. Unless you are scheduled to talk, you can't talk.
- Willens: The U.N. visiting mission came out with a very strong report that was critical of the separate status negotiations. In fact, they recommended that the separate negotiations be stopped. Did the people here in the Northern Marianas look to the United Nations as a place where they could get support and action with respect to the deficiencies of the administering authority here?
- Atalig: Yes. That's the feeling of the people over here. But they got so disappointed when they learned that the United Nations was not in favor of separate status talks. So that's when the people here thought it was a final day for them to present their views. Apparently they believed the United Nations was the only body that they can file any complaints with or they can get their views across to the United Nations. So when the U.N. totally opposed the separate status negotiation, the people were so disappointed.
- Willens: Can you recall any specific problem in the Northern Marianas, putting status aside for the moment, where the United Nations did in fact generate some pressure on the United States to do things differently here than they were otherwise doing?
- Atalig: Economically, political and other social infrastructure, development of the Northern Marianas, the terms of the administration—those basic areas were still not up to the standards of acceptance to them. Those were the areas that the United Nations recognized as still deficient and needed to be promoted and improved.
- Willens: You think that the annual meetings of the Trusteeship Council and the requirement of an annual report by the United States was a vehicle for bringing some pressure to bear on the United States?

- Atalig: There is no question about that.
- Willens: Did you ever participate in a meeting of the Trusteeship Council?
- Atalig: No. I never participated in any of the Trusteeship Council meetings.
- Willens: But your recollection is that when the U.N. visiting mission report took a strong view against the Northern Marianas status negotiations, that the people here felt that the United Nations had really let them down?
- Atalig: That's correct.
- Willens: It was in the summer of 1973 when the issue of the moratorium on homesteading and economic development on Tinian became a major political issue. You became a very active spokesman and critic of the United States action here. How did you first learn about this moratorium?
- Atalig: don't really recall how I first learned [about this moratorium issue], but maybe through some of the Tinian leaders or some of these people there. They became very upset. So that's how I became very actively involved in the issues of the moratorium and homesteading program in Tinian.
- Willens: The documents seem to indicate that there had been a long standing dispute about homestead permits in general here in the Northern Marianas. The Micronesia Legal Services Corporation had a lawsuit pending that they ultimately won. Did you feel that the Trust Territory government was not administering the law properly?
- Atalig: Oh, no question about that. They had been so reluctant in administering the law properly over here, like the homesteading programs. Many people were so discontented, waiting for so long to acquire land, when others, like the Jones grazing land, the duration in approving their application is much faster than executing the homesteading programs for the local people. That's how they got very disappointed with this.
- Willens: There are some people who had the view that the homesteading program was too generous, and it provided more land for families than they could, in fact, farm. Did you have any opinion at the time?
- Atalig: I don't think that it is too generous because these are the only resources, natural resources, which our ancestors left behind for us. The land is considered one of the natural resources left behind by our ancestors. In other words, the land belongs to us.
- Willens: As a result of the moratorium, Mr. Wilson of Ambassador Williams's staff came out here in August of 1973 and Ambassador Williams came over to speak to the Legislature later in the month of August. They generally tried to defend the moratorium as being necessary in order to avoid speculation with respect to the land that might be obtained by the United States for military purposes and they represented that it might be for a very short period of time. Did you participate in any of the discussions with either Wilson or Williams with respect to the reasons behind the moratorium?
- Atalig: Yes, I did. People were very, very suspicious as to their motive in establishing a moratorium for the homesteading program. Many of them opposed the idea of having this moratorium for Tinian for the homesteading program.
- Willens: Well, what did you think about it, in terms of the need not to give homesteads to people on land that might then have to be taken from them or purchased from them because the military wanted it?

- Atalig: Nobody thinks that that position taken by the military was correct. It's very much like an autocratic form of government that, whether you like it or not, we still have to take this land away from you. But we are here just as a courtesy to advise that we are going to establish a moratorium. But actually, they have already planned that they will get this land. Nobody ever liked the idea that once you established this moratorium, that the people who legally owned the lands cannot be allowed to get their own land.
- Willens: You disagreed with the U.S. position that it was necessary then?
- Atalig: I disagreed totally that it was necessary because today nothing happened to the land.
- Willens: Was there a lot of pent-up demand for homesteads on Tinian? I have read that there was, that the farmers who were using the land were making a decent living in selling the products.
- Atalig: Well, Tinian is merely a subsistence economy. People depend on their farms. So, any reduction of their land needs hinders their economic development by making more crops to sell for their well-being. So, obviously, to establish a moratorium without any consideration of the local people's needs and habits, then that really is a problem. No consideration whatsoever was taken by the United States at least to find out if in fact the moratorium was actually needed.
- Willens: Ambassador Williams defended the moratorium, but he more or less apologized for the failure to consult in advance. How long did the moratorium in fact stay in place?
- Atalig: I don't know the exact terms of this moratorium, but it was quite long. People up to this time are still getting mad because today the two-thirds of Tinian leased to the U.S. military is still not being used. The land is still being condemned by the United States.
- Willens: There were extensive provisions for leasing back some portion of that land. I forget the details at the moment. Is it your view that the lease-back provisions that were ultimately negotiated were not satisfactory?
- Atalig: Really not satisfactory. Now it is better, because during these days you can take the United States—if you don't agree—at least to the court or other means of registering your discontentment with them. But during those days you have no means of registering your own concerns. If you disagree with Ambassador Williams, then that's it. But nowadays, if you disagree, then either you go to court or you file a restraining order with the United States, and then just let the court decide. So we have more authority now to express our own views than years ago.
- Willens: You filed a petition to the United Nations on this subject. Do you recall that?
- Atalig: I believe so.
- Willens: Was the matter ever heard, to your knowledge, by anyone at the U.N.?
- Atalig: I don't know whether it was heard or what, because up to now the two-thirds land in Tinian still remains unused and untouched.
- Willens: Later that year there was another round of negotiations between the Marianas Political Status Commission and the U.S. Delegation. There was some further discussion about Tinian, but no movement on the key issues. Did you agree that the Commission could not, on behalf of the people, agree to sell the land, that it had to insist that the land be leased?
- Atalig: That became a very controversial issue to the people of Tinian. As a result of that, today still many of them have not agreed to sell their land to the military. And, if I am not

- mistaken, Bill Nabors is one of those that is still fighting the sale of the land to the military because he does not agree with the price the military had offered them.
- Willens: As it worked out, the Marianas Public Land Corporation was supposed to acquire any land that was privately owned and then make it available to the military. What is your recollection of that whole process? Was it fairly done?
- Atalig: No. I think that many of the people were helped by this. The island of Tinian in terms of their population has the most millionaires that you can find in the world. Many of the people benefited from these military land sales.
- Willens: You may not recall an exchange of words with Mr. Wilson in December of 1973, that's nearly 20 years ago. Apparently the day before the negotiations closed, you were invited to a reception. You had an exchange of words with Mr. Wilson about the homestead moratorium, and it generated some exchange of letters and so forth. Do you have any recollection of that incident?
- Atalig: I believe I have. I am beginning to recall now that I have an exchange of words with, what was his name?
- Willens: Jim Wilson.
- Atalig: Jim Wilson, yes. I am beginning to think that, as a matter of fact, I became very rude at one point to him. But to what extent now, I don't recall. But I do now remember that I almost fought with this guy.
- Willens: It did get a lot of coverage in the press, but I think in the grand scheme of things probably isn't terribly important. In 1974, the Congress of Micronesia did enact legislation authorizing a constitutional convention for all of Micronesia. The Congress had failed to do so during two or three years before that point. What was your position as a Marianas representative to the Congress of Micronesia about the Marianas participating in a constitutional convention that would cover all of the districts?
- Atalig: I don't have any recollection of that and certainly I think the idea to have a constitutional convention for the districts was not a bad idea. It was good in terms of gathering all the respective delegates from the other districts and express their own views, exchange ideas, and see what can mutually be accepted or not and what benefits can we derive from one district to the other. But I believe that idea was totally rejected by the Northern Marianas, if I am not mistaken.
- Willens: There was a big debate within the Marianas in late 1974 and early 1975 whether the Marianas delegates ought to participate. It got all tied up with the plebiscite on the Covenant and so forth. But you generally were in support of the idea of having a constitutional convention for all of Micronesia?
- Atalig: Yes, I was supportive of that for the reasons stated.
- Willens: By 1974, both the Marshalls and Palau had on various occasions declared within the Congress of Micronesia that they were dissatisfied with the way in which the Congress was functioning and wanted to consider opening up separate negotiations with the United States. Taking one district at a time, beginning with the Marshalls, did you believe that that separatist movement, as articulated by the Marshall leadership, was real?
- Atalig: I believe so, because that movement was headed by Amata Kabua.
- Willens: He was ultimately designated as head of their Political Status Commission. I forget, was he a member of the Congress?

Atalig: He was still a member of the Congress at that time when he was appointed to head the Status Commission in the Marshalls.

Willens: Over the past few years before 1974, the Marshalls had complained about the revenue allocation issue that you mentioned earlier. They thought that because they generated a substantial portion of the revenues, resulting from the lease to the United States, that they should get a larger share of the appropriated funds. Were there any other major issues that you think separated the Marshalls from the other districts?

Atalig: I think that's basically the major issue. The Marshalls also had expressed views like the Northern Marianas on revenue-sharing.

Willens: How about Palau, did you think the same forces were at work there?

Atalig: Yes, Palau too.

Willens: You served in the Congress of Micronesia for four years, and you did share a feeling of camaraderie at least, with many of your colleagues in the Congress of Micronesia. Do you think now that there could have been an opportunity to keep all the districts together?

Atalig: I don't think so because the more you reflect on where we are now, there is so much distance in terms of our geographic locations and cultural and other factors to be considered. Nowadays most of our young generation are going to school on the mainland. They learn so many different things that they tend to devalue the old traditions of this society. So to continue associating with the other districts, at this time, I don't think it will ever work out. The Marshalls is different, Pohnpei is different, Truk is different. Maybe within those districts themselves, that would be good. But to combine the other districts of Micronesia together with Saipan or Palau, I don't think it would work out.

Willens: Well, when you were in the Congress of Micronesia, did you feel that the Congress was a unifying force that brought people and leaders together or did it become a forum in which their separate and diverse views were voiced?

Atalig: Well, the Congress was actually being dominated mainly by Pohnpei and Truk. So that's how I viewed that. It's a forum at least of leaders to get together and share the views and ideas of their own districts. But the ideas and problems presented to the Congress may not be relevant to the other districts. That's what makes it seem not to be workable. But it's the best meeting place for all the leaders within Micronesia, for sharing ideas and sharing problems.

Willens: Do you think it had much of an impact on the Trust Territory Administration?

Atalig: No question about that. I think the Trust Territory played the major role in not fragmenting the districts and continuing under the status quo during those days.

Willens: There are those who say that the thing that held Micronesia together for all those years was their common dislike for the Trust Territory Administration. My question to you is whether you think that, by resolutions and enactment of legislation, the Congress of Micronesia improved the administration of the Trust Territory?

Atalig: Yes.

Willens: For many years there had been complaints that the Micronesians weren't allowed to appoint officials, elect district administrators, enjoy more self-government here, exercise more control over funds that were appropriated by the Congress. Did you see any hope that there would be increased self-government over time through the Congress of Micronesia?

Atalig: Yes. I was very optimistic that such hopes would one day be realized. The Congress of Micronesia was very instrumental in supporting this hope, together with the constant pressure of the United Nations on the administering authority and the Trust Territory Administration. That's how they started to put some Micronesians in key positions to administer their own affairs.

Willens: During the time that you were active in politics, in the late 1960's and the early 1970's, did you see more Micronesians being given the opportunity to run agencies and improve their administrative skills?

Atalig: No, very little because of the view of the Trust Territory Administration that Micronesians aren't capable enough to be given an opportunity to serve in any high authority position.

Willens: I've seen some documents that are extremely critical of the personnel, particularly the expatriate personnel, in the Trust Territory government during those years. I haven't talked to people who were in the Trust Territory Administration in those years. I'm sure they take a different view. Is it your sense that the expatriates for the most part were not responsive to Micronesian interests?

Atalig: Very definitely. Further that was my own personal view. They were scared to assign a Micronesian to understudy their position. I cannot believe their view that it takes a Micronesian many years to study their position. I don't think that Micronesians are too dumb to undertake any administrative position. We go to school, although we may not be as bright as many Americans, but at least we manage to graduate as an average citizens, and one doesn't have to be a genius to be able to run a good administration.

Willens: Were they protecting their own jobs?

Atalig: Protecting their own jobs, because the jobs that they are getting here may not be easily acquired in the mainland, where they are very competitive. You know you come down here—so relaxed and no competition—you are getting your salary, you are getting your housing, you are getting so many privileges that may not be accorded if you were to hold the same position back home.

Willens: In the session of the Congress of Micronesia in early 1974, the Congress failed on the last day or two to enact a piece of legislation that would implement the return of public lands back to the districts. The United States had announced a new policy in late 1973 to return public lands to the districts, but it required legislation by the Congress of Micronesia. It seemed to have gotten tied up in some technical debate about the particular legislation before the Congress. Do you have any recollection as to the public land issue and the terms on which it should be returned to the people?

Atalig: No, I don't recall that particular legislation.

Willens: Later in 1974, Herman M. Manglona and I think Felipe Mendiola hired a Guamanian law firm, Mr. Ariola I believe, to present a position paper on behalf of certain Tinian citizens who were opposed to giving the United States more than one-third of the island. You responded rather negatively to this initiative although you had been an outspoken critic of the U.S. request for two-thirds or more of the island. What do you think prompted this particular effort?

Atalig: Effort for?

Willens: To hire a Guamanian lawyer to fight the U.S. on this point.

- Atalig: Well, I think what prompted that effort was that people got tired of just expressing their views to Administration officials. In spite of their expressions, the Administration seems reluctant to at least give a chance to look into what actually are their main concerns. So as a result of that frustration, the late mayor together with the present mayor, Herman Manglona, decided that the only course that they can pursue was to hire a lawyer from Guam to represent their views.
- Willens: This happened a month or so after District Administrator Ada had refused to approve a municipal ordinance enacted by the Tinian Council to permit a referendum on the island of Tinian to ascertain what the real sentiment of the people was with respect to giving the United States access to some portion of the island. As I recall, you were a supporter of the referendum and you expressed disappointment when Ada failed to give it approval. Do you remember that incident?
- Atalig: Yes, very vividly. During those days, Ada was just a rubber stamp for the Administration. That was the main reason that I expressed my great discontent over the rejection of such a plebiscite. So, like I stated earlier, the District Administrator was appointed basically to represent the Trust Territory government and not to represent or protect the interests of their own local people.
- Willens: Do you know whether he was instructed to do what he did by the High Commissioner, Ambassador Williams, or anybody else?
- Atalig: I suspect that he must have really received such instruction or advice, which was very contradictory to the wishes and the desire of the people of Tinian.
- Willens: In the election of 1974 you ran again. This was the election at which several members of the Popular Party, including Ed Pangelinan and Herman Q. Guerrero, were defeated. Were you defeated in that election?
- Atalig: Yes, we got defeated.
- Willens: There was some question at the time as to whether political status was an issue in that campaign. Do you have any recollection as to what were the issues? Why do you think the Popular Party candidates, like yourself, got defeated?
- Atalig: I became very unpopular after I went against the party's desires on the boycott.
- Willens: But they endorsed you as a candidate to run for reelection, is that right?
- Atalig: That's correct but there were other issues as well.
- Willens: Do you think that the Territorial Party was successful because they were arguing that the Popular Party was proceeding too rapidly toward a commonwealth relationship with the United States?
- Atalig: Maybe that was the major factor of our defeat, the rapid negotiations regarding our status. The opposition viewed that as a problem and they were scared that we were moving very fast without educating the people actually about the status.
- Willens: By the time of that election, the status negotiations had been underway for nearly two years. Was it your sense at the time that the people still did not comprehend the issues that were involved in the status negotiations?
- Atalig: Very few people comprehended the issues involved. So, during those days, I believe that the people were not fully informed or fully comprehended what actually the content of these status [negotiations] were.

- Willens: In 1974 the Marianas Political Status Commission was holding public meetings trying to explain what it was doing. The Trust Territory government had a program called Education for Self Government which produced programs, materials and so forth. And the Joint Committee was generating a fair amount of publicity with respect to what it was seeking to do with respect to free association. I've seen some indication that these were just too many programs, which conflicted with each other, and didn't really help to educate the people in the Marianas in particular. Is that your sense?
- Atalig: Too many programs within the Northern Marianas which did confuse the people. You have a program about political status from the Northern Marianas, you have a program from the Congress of Micronesia, you have a program from the Trust Territory government. So, that seems to be a factor—people were confused at that time.
- Willens: It's a very small community and the negotiations were well covered in the *Pacific Daily News* and in the *Marianas Variety* and to some extent in the other newspaper, which was *I Gazeta* at the time. There were meetings in the villages. Was there anything more that could have been done in your opinion to make certain that the people were better informed?
- Atalig: Yes. If the issues were handled at the local levels and people were educated in their own terms about what this particular status means to them. In other words, they should have digested this, what does the status mean. For example, if it is a commonwealth like Joe Cruz was advocating, it means more money, more economic development. These are the words that the local people can accept and comprehend. But to use other words that are beyond their comprehension causes them to be confused. I believe that the people were not fully informed. The political education neglected the grassroots level of comprehension.
- Willens: Two of the successful Territorial Party candidates in the 1974 election were Oscar Rasa and Pete A. Tenorio. Were you acquainted with Oscar Rasa at the time?
- Atalig: Oh yes, Oscar Rasa was a very close friend of mine.
- Willens: How would you characterize him as he was at that time?
- Atalig: Rasa was very intellectual and had the capability too of influencing the public. He was a very well liked. He was very popular until he started screwing himself up. But during those days Rasa had the charismatic appeal that can convince people.
- Willens: I heard he was a very effective grassroots campaigner.
- Atalig: Very much. You know, he has the looks, he has the talent, he has the charisma. So the combination of those factors made him a very effective politician.
- Willens: How would you characterize Pete A. Tenorio in those days?
- Atalig: Pete A. Tenorio was also the same, a very likeable person and very intelligent, a person who can attach himself to the grassroots label, and very well liked too. He continued to maintain that kind of attitude up to now. No matter what office he holds, he always gains the public confidence. It's very surprising because during those days that he ran for the Congress of Micronesia, most of his registered voters have moved from Chalan Kanoa to Oleai in order to give more votes to the other candidates. But in spite of many transferred registered voters from his precinct, he managed to win the election.
- Willens: After the election results were in, did you think that the status negotiations would either be terminated or be slowed down?
- Atalig: It was the determination of the Status Commission to change their approach in a very

gradual and very comprehensive manner.

Willens: There was a session of negotiations in December of 1974 and then it recessed until February of 1975. One of the things that happened during that recess was that the islands of Rota and Tinian came forward with their request for a bicameral legislature with an upper house in which those two islands would have equal representation with the island of Saipan. That ultimately was accepted by the Marianas Political Status Commission and is in the Covenant. What is your assessment of the way in which that particular requirement of a bicameral house has worked out?

Atalig: I think that's the only way these two islands can be well represented in the legislature. The previous set up of the Legislature showed that the people of Rota and the people of Tinian cannot adequately be represented or get their fair share. So by having this bicameral legislature with equal representation in the Senate, that's the only way they can be represented effectively in this Commonwealth.

Willens: You were in the Commonwealth Legislature from 1980 to 1982?

Atalig: No. I served if I am not mistaken for maybe two or three terms.

Willens: You were a member of the Democratic Party at that time?

Atalig: That's correct.

Willens: So you served in the Legislature at a time when the governor was Carlos Camacho, who was a Democrat, and then you remained in the Legislature when the Republican governor, Pete Tenorio, took office. What was your sense as to the ability of the Executive Branch and the Legislative Branch to work together in those years? I have heard that the first Administration had difficulty working with the Legislature because of the difference in parties.

Atalig: Well, that's always been expected in politics here in the Northern Marianas. People take very seriously whether you are with the right party or not. So if you are in the wrong party, then the chances of working cohesively are very, very low.

Willens: This is a problem that has to be resolved over time?

Atalig: Yes. Right now, for example, the House and the Senate are comprised mainly of Republicans, but the Governor-Elect Froilan Tenorio is a Democrat. If he can work cooperatively with the Legislature, I don't think that he will have any problems—not like the first governor here in the Northern Marianas when there was always a battle between the Administration and the Legislature.

Willens: What caused that in the first Administration in your opinion?

Atalig: Well, basically because politics plays very heavily here in the Northern Marianas. They tried to undo each other. We are in the Legislature and we are not the same office [or position as the Governor], so therefore we have the authority to do this. He doesn't have the authority over us. That kind of feeling existed among the leaders themselves.

Willens: Did Rota and Tinian use the additional protection of the upper house wisely, or have there been occasions you think where they have together tried to dominate the Legislature?

Atalig: I believe that they have always used it very wisely. They have been directed by their own people to do this. The people of Rota, the people of Tinian have expectations of their representatives. These people have been voted in by their own respective [constituents] so whatever you are directed to do, that's what your own people ask you to do. In a sense, to go and act against your own people, it will cause some problems for you. The Rotanese

[representatives in the Legislature] are accountable to the people of Rota; they are not accountable to Saipan. It's just like the congressman from Saipan who presently contends that the delegations from Rota and Tinian are asking too much. But to the representatives of Rota and Tinian, they are not asking too much. That's what the people of Rota and Tinian asked them to do for them. So, they have been using their offices very, very wisely.

Willens: Well looking at the Commonwealth now from your perspective of nearly 25 years in public and private life, what do you think are the major problems that are confronting the Commonwealth today?

Atalig: The major problems are immigration and labor. We are so relaxed in our policy that there have been no direct policies to control the influx of people. Even communist countries send people here.

Willens: Even what?

Atalig: Communist areas, Beijing. Communist China. In all those places you need to have a visa. You need to go to Hong Kong, you need to have visa. But in the Northern Marianas you can bring in communist Chinese without any requirements. They move in. They arrive in the Saipan airport, they give you five days to stay, but there is no follow-up or check-up whether you have left the islands or are still around. So practically any communist or any aliens that move to the Northern Marianas can stay for as long as they want. There is no checkpoint whether they are here or not.

Willens: How do you feel about the fact that the economic development that the Commonwealth has enjoyed is largely dependent on alien laborers?

Atalig: I am not against alien laborers from other countries, third country nationals. My concern here is that we are so relaxed that even now they using Saipan as a dumping point. You bring in people from Sri Lanka, you bring in people from Pakistan, you bring in people from Nepal because this is the easiest place for them to enter [the U.S.]. They can easily just come in but you see so many aliens walking around this place who have no jobs.

Willens: How do you feel the Covenant as a whole has worked out?

Atalig: I think that the Covenant is so relaxed in the delegation of the responsibility and authority, specifically in these areas that concern me. We have a very, very good immigration officer but the problem is adequate funding so that he can efficiently run the immigration office. We have so many people staying over that they are using Saipan as a dumping point for aliens.

Willens: Do you have any views about the relationship between the Commonwealth and the federal government?

Atalig: The main issue, which I believe is a major cause of the victory of Froilan Tenorio, is establishing a better relationship with the federal government. He views the relationship with the federal officials as not so good and, as a result of that, the \$120 million that is supposed to be given to the CNMI by the federal government has not arrived. So, he wants to establish a very good relationship with the federal government.

Willens: Would you identify that as one of the principal factors contributing to his election success?

Atalig: No question about that. I think that was one of his major issues. With all the concerns raised by the other federal agencies about how federal funds have been used over here, we have not established good rapport with the federal officials. I think that is one of the major

factors causing the defeat of the present administration.

Siemer: Tell me why you decided to run for the First Constitutional Convention?

Atalig: Well, I was interested really to formulate our own constitution and it was for that very reason that I decided to throw in my name and try to participate.

Siemer: At the time of the Constitutional Convention, did you switch parties from the Popular Party to the Territorial Party?

Atalig: No. The Constitutional Convention was non-political and presented to the public as non-partisan. Fortunately I picked out a number that is very well known and popular. That is number 44. So, I associated my number to Formula 44, the cough medicine, and that was presented to the public. Formula 44, that's my number, so that's how I got in the Convention.

Siemer: Did you actually go and pick numbers out of a hat at Canham's office?

Atalig: Yes. We had to pick out numbers. After you pick out your number, then you have to go and campaign.

Siemer: How did you get appointed as a committee chairman after the delegates were elected?

Atalig: The committee chairmen were selected based on the agreement by certain party leaders as well as the temporary leaders of the Convention. So, I did express my interest based on my experience and qualifications on personal rights and natural resources in chairing that committee. With the approval of the other members I was appointed by the president of the Convention.

Siemer: You were one of the people who had the most legislative experience in the Convention, weren't you?

Atalig: Yes.

Siemer: And you had had a lot of experience in running committees and getting things done.

Atalig: That's correct.

Siemer: The task of getting all of personal rights and all of natural resources issues done in a very short time was a very substantial one.

Atalig: Yes, a very short time.

Siemer: How did you go about picking the members of your committee?

Atalig: The selection of the committees was actually up to the delegates, which particular committee do they want, and also to ensure that the committee represented all the segments of the groups, including the minorities as well as the islands of Rota and Tinian.

Siemer: So you wanted some people from Rota and Tinian and some people from Saipan on every committee?

Atalig: That is correct, yes.

Siemer: Did the committee chairmen try to juggle delegates around once the delegates had expressed their preference in order to get a balance on the committees?

Atalig: Yes. As a matter of fact they can also switch, if they so desire, their committee [assignment]. They may have more interest in one particular committee and they have more expertise in

that particular area, so that's up to the delegates where they want to serve.

Siemer: Had you worked with Jose Mafnas or Ben Fitial before?

Atalig: No, I have never worked with them, but we are very close friends. We all have legislative experience.

Siemer: Had you worked closely with any of the members of your committee before the Convention?

Atalig: Yes. Dr. Palacios, I did work very closely with him.

Siemer: In the Congress of Micronesia?

Atalig: Congress of Micronesia as well as the hospital. Also Pete Atalig, who used to be our legal counsel for the Legislature.

Siemer: Your committee had a good deal of success in getting its proposals through the floor process. Do you recall why that was?

Atalig: The reason why it was very successful was because of the active participation of the delegates and the directions that were given by the chairmen. I think that most of the members that served on our committee were very articulate and very, very active participants. So that was one reason, and another was the assistance of the legal counsel. We managed to report on more resolutions and other measures to be considered [on the floor] than any other committee. My group was very, very active and we did have a lot of major things to contribute at this Constitution.

Siemer: You had probably more individual proposals than any other committee to decide on and make reports on. You handled most of the floor presentations yourself, didn't you?

Atalig: Yes, I did.

Siemer: I think your committee's proposals came to the floor first and were almost all successful in passing.

Atalig: Very successful in passing all measures that were introduced on the floor, basically because of the well-oriented, well-versed and well-prepared individual members. Any member upon being asked to stand can present or defend the measures. One of the things that we were so proud of was that the members were very well-oriented and very well-prepared.

Siemer: Were there particular members that you relied on to help you get things through the floor?

Atalig: Dr. Palacios, who was my vice-chairman, for instance was very, very instrumental too. But I tell you that the members of the Personal Rights and Natural Resources Committee were all very well-trained and well-educated.

Siemer: It was a very good group.

Atalig: Yes, very good, very articulate. A lot of debates were generated among the committee [members] themselves and sometimes you find a very interesting argument presented within the committee, so that's the most challenging part as a committee chairman. I did enjoy the participation of the delegates on the committee.

Siemer: Did you find that most of the points were made in the committee so there were no surprises on the floor?

Atalig: We had no surprise because our committee members were very well-qualified and very

well-prepared. They read the committee reports, they read the measures, and they educated themselves. Most of all, they have spent months in discussions with legal counsel. One thing I am proud of is that we minimized the participation of the legal counsel in formulating the measures that the committee wanted, but the legal counsel consulted for any legal matters or any inappropriate expression in the bills. But as far as being dominated by the legal counsel regarding what must be introduced or done, that never happened in my committee. We have established the policy that this Constitution is our own Constitution, therefore, it should be mainly coming from the local delegates.

Siemer: How did your committee members feel about the briefing papers that they got?

Atalig: The briefing papers were so adequate, very precise and very comprehensive. They were expressed in terms that are easily comprehended and digested without spending too much time. So that was really helpful in terms of the committee presentation. That minimized explanations of the briefing papers. The committee can read and comprehend because they were prepared in a very simple way and to a level of comprehension that any member of the committee can easily understand.

Siemer: The members of your committee usually came to the meetings pretty well prepared, didn't they?

Atalig: Definitely. I think that these committee members have shown their great interest in coming [to the meetings] and have shown their expertise in debating with one another.

Siemer: Through the demands of the chairman?

Atalig: Yes, but I did enjoy the attitude that they came prepared to show that they know what they are talking about. So, actually if you are not prepared and participate in the discussion, then there might be some talking that they make fun of one another, that this guy is not prepared. So, really the attitude of the Personal Rights and Natural Resources Committee is to come prepared and accept that, if you are not prepared, they will make fun of you.

Siemer: As chairman, you managed to avoid the kinds of divisions between the Saipan representatives and the Rota and Tinian delegates. How did you go about doing that?

Atalig: We just recognized their equal rights. You know there is no such thing that Saipan has more rights than Rota or Tinian. They all have the same role to play in this important committee. They all have the same right to contribute to this particular committee.

Siemer: You seemed to be able as chairman to smooth over those differences and to get people to contribute without getting them arguing along island lines. The Personal Rights Committee seemed to be actually the most successful in that regard. There were the fewest of those island-to-island arguments in your committee.

Atalig: Well, basically with the experience that I have had in the Legislature and also being from the island of Rota, that gave me the advantage of conducting this committee in an orderly and fair manner. It can easily be detected when the discussion is deviating from the mission of the committee. You have to be alert in detecting any conflict that might arise.

Siemer: Did you meet with your committee members outside of the regular committee sessions to try make sure that things were going smoothly?

Atalig: Sometimes we have very informal meetings before the committee's meeting. These people are very intellectual, like the current president of the Senate. He was very young but a very, very articulate person. So, it's a matter of pride during those days to show that you know what you are talking about. The guidance and the procedures set up by our committee resulted in our many successful contributions to this Constitution.

- Siemer: When you were on the floor, you often recognized people in the gallery, either politicians or high school principals and students. Why did you do that?
- Atalig: It's a gesture of acknowledging the presence of your leaders or the presence of your friends. That gives you more sense of recognition by your own people and your own leaders. By being recognized in such an important body, people feel good. So I do that basically for them.
- Siemer: Were you concerned during the Convention that the Constitution might not be ratified?
- Atalig: I never entertained the idea that the Constitution may not be ratified. Whether it was ratified or not, we have done our very best. All the delegates of this Convention participated and they made a contribution one way or another, so I was very happy whether it was ratified or not.
- Siemer: You also were very careful on the floor to correct errors in the journal or to correct comments, do you recall that?
- Atalig: Yes, I was very careful in that. Also, when you speak on the floor people will be listening to how you talk, usually in English. There are some people who, when your English is not correct, they will make fun of you and say what kind of English were you using on the floor? So, that's why we have to do this. Like the experience that we have in the Legislature, every session that we have, the journal has to be reviewed and adopted by the Legislature and if there is any correction, it should be made in the journal. So, those experiences that I have at the Legislature gave me great confidence in standing up to play the role that what I was playing. I was proud that I played the role as a leader and the role of a delegate and, most of all, roles where I felt that I knew what I was doing.
- Siemer: Were you concerned in making corrections to the journal that the comments would be quoted later on?
- Atalig: I was never concerned. I did what I believed should be done and when I believed that it's right. So whether it was quoted or what, that's of no concern. I do not correct to be quoted or what, but basically I did it simply because I feel that it was a necessity to do it on my part.
- Siemer: A number of the delegates would abstain fairly often and you rarely did that. Why did people think they needed to abstain in the voting?
- Atalig: Sometimes you need to abstain when it comes to an issue that may be in conflict or may not be appropriate to the measures that you believe are good or right. So, I think that abstaining is an indication that you can either show that you are not in total agreement or disagreement with that.
- Siemer: You rarely abstained though. You almost always had a firm position one way or the other.
- Atalig: I voted on what I believed is right and what I believe is good for me and the rest.
- Siemer: How did the organization of the Convention work during the Convention? Were there regular meetings of the committee chairmen?
- Atalig: There were some briefings actually with the president of the Convention and also with the legal counsel, usually about the agenda for the particular day. Actually, that was a very nice way to expedite the issues to deliberate on the floor as well as in the committee, by having a briefing with the president and other officials of the Convention.
- Siemer: How did you decide which issues should be tackled on the floor first?

Atalig: The issues are being presented to the delegates. The delegates made suggestions or recommendations. Then upon the general consensus of the committee about what should be taken first it was done in an orderly manner. This was accomplished through the consensus of the committee members.

Siemer: Was it the committee members who decided what issues should come first or was it the leadership that decided which should come to the floor?

Atalig: No. The assignment of the issues is given by the president and then the chairman will have to receive these issues and disseminate them to the members of the committee. Then the committee themselves will discuss which one to take care of first, the most controversial, less controversial, so let's take care of this and then dispose of it. So that's how it was taken care of.

Siemer: Did you try to take the non-controversial things first?

Atalig: That is how I programmed the committee, to identify things that are less controversial. The one that is most controversial will cause much more debate among the members. Let's dispose of the one that is easier. So that's how we proceeded with all the assignments that we have.

Siemer: You also got a lot of delegate proposals that were ultimately disposed of by suggesting that they were legislative subjects and not constitutional subjects and you seemed to be very effective as a committee chairman in persuading your committee that things should not be in the Constitution. Do you remember the flood of proposals that you had?

Atalig: Yes, yes. What I did is to review all these proposals that are assigned to us and then many of those I felt are not supposed to be in the Constitution were disposed of after the consultation with the legal counsel and the briefing of the committee. That saved time by disposing of measures that are not critical to the Constitution.

Siemer: You seemed not to have a problem with your committee in persuading them that these things could be taken care of by the Legislature.

Atalig: I was viewed by my committee members as an authority and as an experienced chairman. I seldom got any rejection of the recommendations that I submitted to them. Of course, I had to convince them that this was the opinion too by the legal counsel, so there is no sense in debating these and we can utilize more time for more essential matters.

Siemer: Did you work on the public hearings that were held in the middle of the Constitutional Convention?

Atalig: Yes, I did.

Siemer: Which ones did you work on?

Atalig: The political education.

Siemer: Did you participate in the hearings that were here in Saipan or the ones in Rota or Tinian?

Atalig: Both here in Saipan, Rota and Tinian.

Siemer: When the Chamber of Commerce came in and testified in opposition to many of the proposals, were you surprised by their positions?

Atalig: Not really, because that's expected in this modern society. Whatever you do, people oppose it. You cannot generally agree on everything.

Siemer: Was the Chamber of Commerce a political power back in that time?

- Atalig: Yes. That should not be surprising.
- Siemer: Were you concerned about their objections with respect to the size of the Legislature and the salaries for legislators?
- Atalig: Yes, a little bit. I had a concern on that.
- Siemer: What was your sense of the rest of the delegates with respect to the issue of the compensation for legislators?
- Atalig: Well, that was very interesting, because the amount prescribed for the salaries of the legislators was considered during those days to be very high, but still acceptable. I didn't think anybody would oppose the salaries prescribed within the Constitution.
- Siemer: There was a debate at one point about whether the salary for legislators should be \$12,000 a year or \$8,000 a year. Did you think that people were responding to criticism when they voted for the \$8,000 level?
- Atalig: Maybe they were responding to the criticisms from the public.
- Siemer: Were there public bodies other than the Chamber of Commerce that were opposed to some of the constitutional provisions?
- Atalig: The Chamber of Commerce seems to be the very vocal in the objections to the salary of the Legislature but they had concerns about other sections as well.
- Siemer: Did your committee have concerns about the protection of the rights of Carolinians?
- Atalig: We never have any concerns that would inhibit the recognition of the rights of the minority. As a matter of fact, it was highly recognized by establishing the Carolinian Affairs office as one of the departments of the administration.
- Siemer: Were you in favor of that?
- Atalig: I was in favor of it. But really the issue here is that the creation of the Carolinian Affairs office is basically establishing a precedent recognizing there is a minority within this place because of the different cultures and beliefs of the Carolinians and the Chamorros. Mr. Fitial was very instrumental in establishing this agency within the government.
- Siemer: What was your view at the time about whether Carolinians could be elected to island-wide office in proportion to their numbers in the population?
- Atalig: I always considered that the Carolinians as well as the Chamorros have equal rights, equal access to anything. I cannot speak against Carolinians because my mother is originally from Truk. So I support the idea that they should also be recognized. But I don't support the other idea that because they view themselves as a minority, they must be given a seat in the Executive Branch or the Legislature. You know, we are living in a democratic form of society and to continue to recognize that there is a minority within this society is aggravating the situation. Of course, we are a minority, but in fact, there shouldn't be any minority. We are all share our Saipan residence.
- Siemer: How has that Executive Assistant for Carolinian Affairs actually worked out in practice over the years?
- Atalig: It seems to work out very well. But the government is beginning to duplicate this for other minorities.
- Siemer: You voted "no" on Article 6, which is local government. Do you recall why you opposed that one?

Atalig: Well, I opposed this because it was giving more authority to the local government. You have already established the certain departments within the Constitution and then the governor is vested with the authority to delegate authority to local governments. But I think there seems to be a lot of duplication in terms of the local government and the function of the administration.

Siemer: There was a strong effort by David Maratita, John Tenorio and some others to do away with local government and rely only on the Commonwealth government. Were you in favor of that?

Atalig: No.

Siemer: You thought there should be some local government?

Atalig: That was my view.

Siemer: You also voted “no” on the land alienation article. Do you remember why you did that?

Atalig: I don't really recall why.

Siemer: There was a long debate on the floor that you participated in about the length of leases that would be allowed. There was a recommendation that the limitation be 25 years and other people thought it should be 40 years. Was that part of the problem?

Atalig: Yes. I think that my vote basically related to the duration and the length of the lease.

Siemer: How do you think that has worked out over the years?

Atalig: So far, I don't know whether it is working to the way that it will solve many ongoing problems of the Northern Marianas. It has not been clearly defined, actually what this land alienation is.

Siemer: Are you pleased with the level of economic progress here?

Atalig: We are pleased with the economic progress here compared with the Trust Territory Administration. During the 30 years that the United States administered the Trust Territory, the infrastructure has not been developed and the economic, political and social areas have not been developed. Through the infusion of foreign capital here, we are able to see these big hotels and more things to present to the tourists than over the many years that we have been part of the Trust Territory.

Siemer: It seems that the Northern Marianas under the Constitution that you folks worked on has done considerably better than some of the other districts.

Atalig: I hope so, and I hope that we have done what we are supposed to do in formulating and enacting this Constitution to protect our own interests. And that was the very purpose in having this Convention, to protect and restore the interest of our own people through their own government.

Siemer: Do you recall a point near the end of the Constitutional Convention when Ben Manglona and some of his colleagues walked out?

Atalig: Yes.

Siemer: Did you know that that was coming?

Atalig: No, I was not aware that it was forthcoming but I think that it was basically over the authority of the mayor or something to that effect.

Siemer: Do you remember the rule in the enabling legislation that there had to be one delegate from every delegation on the floor in order for a quorum to exist?

- Atalig: Yes.
- Siemer: Were you concerned that all of the Rota delegates would walk out?
- Atalig: At first I was very concerned, but later on I felt that there was a good reason for them to do so. I have very strongly supported the Rota delegation.
- Siemer: Were there efforts made to get the delegates to come back?
- Atalig: Yes, I think there were several measures taken including the direction of the president to check with these people. Also the leaders of the Convention gathered together and talked to these people to persuade them to come back. I remember very strongly when we had this meeting to request them to return and to have this matter debated again in the House.
- Siemer: Did the people who walked out think that they were going to disrupt the whole Convention?
- Atalig: That's what the main thought was.
- Siemer: Was it their view that there should be no Constitution?
- Atalig: I don't think so. The only concern was over their representation in the House. So as far as other issues are concerned, I ruled that out.
- Siemer: If there were going to be 12 representatives from Saipan and either one or two from Rota, what difference did it make? I mean 12 representatives from Saipan could so easily out-vote one or two from Rota. Whether it was one or two, what difference did it make?
- Atalig: Maybe to us, we may say what difference does it make. But to the leaders of Rota, who believe in protecting their interests and in seeing the benefits forthcoming, they felt that the number of representatives was an important factor in their representation in the Legislature.
- Siemer: But you were a very experienced politician. At that time you had been in politics for a long time and Rota had equal representation in the Senate so it and Tinian could block anything. Why was it important enough to walk out over a representative in the lower house?
- Atalig: I don't know really what was the main reason that made it important for them to walk out. Like you said, there's equal representation in the upper house. We felt that in Rota and Tinian nothing can be done. But as far as the issue on the two representatives of Rota, I really don't know what was the motivation.
- Siemer: Did you feel after the public hearings when there began to be final votes with respect to constitutional provisions, did you feel that the time limitation was causing things to be rushed along?
- Atalig: Yes, a little bit. It was my feeling that the duration of the Constitutional Convention was a little bit too short. That was the major cause in rushing many of the provisions.
- Siemer: Who picked 50 days?
- Atalig: I don't know, I don't recall.
- Siemer: Did that come out of the Micronesian Constitutional Convention?
- Atalig: Maybe.
- Siemer: It was enacted in the enabling legislation, and we never knew where it came from.

- Atalig: I don't even know how these 50 days come about and only after it becomes law.
- Siemer: Had you had anything to do with the Micronesian Constitutional Convention in 1975?
- Atalig: No.
- Siemer: What about after the Constitution was approved, did you work on the referendum with respect to the Constitution?
- Atalig: No.
- Siemer: Did you hold public office after that?
- Atalig: Yes. I served in many instances as a consultant and then also I did run again for the Legislature and I won one time and then I lost.
- Siemer: When did you win?
- Atalig: After the Convention I ran again for the Congress of Micronesia.
- Siemer: In 1977?
- Atalig: Yes. And then I became very much involved with my outside personal life and that's how my political career started deteriorating. So, that was the declining of my days in public office. I never really thought that running for public office should be a career. You run at a certain time when you feel there is a need to do so. But one should not use this public office as a career and as the basis for your own future. It is more a liability on my part to continue running for public office, as there are many demands and attention needed for the public and so many requests that have to be attended to. Politics here are so sensitive. To shorten that, it has never been my inspiration to use this public office as my career.
- Siemer: With which party did you run as a candidate when you ran successfully for the Legislature?
- Atalig: I ran as a Democrat.
- Siemer: And that was the party where you ran again the next time?
- Atalig: I switched party again. I ran for the Republican nomination and I lost.
- Siemer: It was 1982?
- Atalig: Somewhere around that year, during the 1980's.
- Siemer: Have you run again since?
- Atalig: Yes, I ran. That's when I lost.
- Siemer: How about after that?
- Atalig: I never thought of running again because I am a divorcee. Over here, that has a lot to do with your public image. If I had to continue my career, I could not be running for the public office. I never wanted to run any more for public office.
- Siemer: When you considered the office of Washington representative when you were in the Convention, were you concerned about the election of a Washington representative from a different party than the governor?
- Atalig: No, it never concerned me. I think that no matter how we do it, we always come into a party situation.
- Siemer: You think it will work all right?

Atalig: It will work all right. Many of these things we inherit from the United States. Whether it is good or bad, at the beginning it causing more confusion and animosity among families themselves. Politics plays a very important role within the family. We learned in U.S. politics to have these two political parties. But now people are beginning to be more mature. The very good example of this is the defeat of the present CNMI administration. In spite of all of these pictures presented of accomplishments, miles of roads and other things, people now are smart enough to believe that just roads and water are not sufficient to win. They must go further than that. So that is why I am saying that people nowadays are more educated and mature to vote their own conscience. Years ago, if you put anybody on the Popular Party ticket, they will win. That's why I never lost when I was in the Popular Party. But now it's very different. These days you have to establish your own identity, people have to know you, and the most important part of it, you have to have money. If you don't have money, you cannot run for public office. Years ago when I ran for the Popular Party, it was not money. You just need the endorsement of the Party and then you get elected.

Siemer: How many Ataligs families are here in Saipan?

Atalig: Not as many as in Rota. Ataligs actually originated from Rota.

Siemer: All of the Ataligs came from Rota?

Atalig: Yes. All of the Ataligs, including the Chief Justice, Tony Atalig, David Atalig, they are all from Rota.

Willens: Thank you very much, Mr. Atalig. We appreciate your willingness to help us with these interviews.