

INTERVIEW OF LEON T. CAMACHO

by Howard P. Willens

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- Willens: Leon T. Camacho was a member of the first Marianas District Legislature in 1963 and served in that body for many years. He has been kind enough to agree to be interviewed today in Saipan. Mr. Camacho, thank you very much for being available. I wonder if we can begin the interview by you telling me a little bit about yourself. Where were you born and where were you educated?
- Camacho: Yes. I was born 1928, April 11, in Garapan during the Japanese period. For seven years I went to Japanese school until 1940, when I graduated. Then I worked in Japanese security for approximately three or four years.
- Willens: What did those duties consist of?
- Camacho: Well actually this was like a messenger boy in the beginning. Then I was promoted to training for the police force. During that time we were used sometimes by the military to carry the mail to the admirals and generals, whatever office they have.
- Willens: Did the Japanese trust the local people to carry out those duties?
- Camacho: Yes, some. We have been chosen by the school to work on those particular jobs.
- Willens: You were chosen by the school?
- Camacho: I was chosen by the school for this work for the Japanese government. The rest of my colleagues or classmates worked in hard labor, in heavy hard labor during the building of airport in Japanese time, like carrying soil, coral or whatever like that, making up a hand-made airfield.
- Willens: What is your general recollection today of life during the Japanese time?
- Camacho: Well, during my youngest years it was peacetime, I think until before I graduated. By the time I graduated, they already had military in the Japanese government offices. Some military were already in there. So this is the time when the treatment is also very strict.
- Willens: I don't understand that. They then became very strict?
- Camacho: Very strict in their treatment of Chamorros. They were starting to become very discriminatory during that time.
- Willens: About when would that take place?
- Camacho: Oh, maybe since 1936, 1937, 1939. We began to see the difference. Our boss had been changed, sent back to Japan, and we got a new boss when we could actually feel the difference.
- Willens: Some people recall that the Japanese managed to develop most of the island for agriculture.
- Camacho: Yes.
- Willens: What is your recollection of that?
- Camacho: Well, I was about seven or ten years old when I remember my grandfather planting some sugar cane.

- Willens: He was planting sugar cane?
- Camacho: Sugar cane to make sugar for a Japanese company. They called it South Pacific Company or something like that.
- Willens: Did he make a profit doing that?
- Camacho: Yes. Also they managed buying from their own store, the company store. You can have credit and, when you have a payday, you have to pay back what you owe to it.
- Willens: What happened to you and your family during the war itself?
- Camacho: Well, I was on duty in the government as a messenger boy carrying letters, something like that. On 1944, June 10, there was an air raid. Until 11 or 12, I cannot take off, so I stayed on my duty because I cannot release myself to go home.
- Willens: Why not?
- Camacho: Because it is too strict. You cannot go on the road for walking around or anywhere because of all the military around here. You know, there were 30,000 or 40,000 military people around here, and those people have their own strict orders. There is no walking on the road because this is what they call "spy week," "spy months." Very delicate.
- Willens: They basically would declare that no local person could be on the street?
- Camacho: During the air raids. And after those air raids, they never came back to secure [times]; they just keep on going throughout the war. So I snap myself away from my job, and I run away.
- Willens: Where did you go?
- Camacho: Well, I have a chance to ask them [for permission] to leave there because we were already thirsty, and we didn't have any water. So I asked permission to take a few of the Japanese prisoners.
- Willens: Personnel?
- Camacho: Yes, from the jails. We were watching the jail and also the prisoners.
- Willens: The prisoners?
- Camacho: The prisoners, yes. And we took them around to get some water. We asked permission to go get some water and between the time we went out to get some water, I lost the prisoners and I lose myself too. Because I knew that they would never come back to peace. This is already war.
- Willens: Did you stay on the island?
- Camacho: Yes, I ran to my house, to my farm in Fina Sisú.
- Willens: Did they ever come looking for you?
- Camacho: No, because there is no one to go back to any jobs. It is already an air raid.
- Willens: By this time.
- Camacho: Three days later, there was the invasion coming up.
- Willens: The air raids you are referring to took place just a few days before the invasion?
- Camacho: Right, right, only a few days. In about three or four days I was captured by the Americans.
- Willens: You were captured?

- Camacho: Yes. It takes me about two days to travel to Fina Sisú. I walked around the battle. The airplanes were around there, you know.
- Willens: You walked?
- Camacho: I walked through the boonies.
- Willens: It was dangerous?
- Camacho: Very dangerous, very dangerous, because they had some burning ammunition. A burning ammunition dump goes up in any direction.
- Willens: Did you have family at that time?
- Camacho: Yes, my mother and father. I was raised by my grandfather and grandmother. I went to see them during the battle time. The air raid time.
- Willens: Did they all survive?
- Camacho: Only my grandfather died. He was killed by the Japanese because they suspected that he was one of the Americans, because of his color, his nose, everything.
- Willens: What did they do?
- Camacho: Well, they kill him, they shoot him. But we cannot find the body. We went back after the war, but we cannot find the body. There were a lot of pigs wild pigs and bodies were destroyed by the animals. Loose pig, wild pig, like that. So we cannot find the body.
- Willens: After the invasion you say you were captured by the Americans?
- Camacho: Yes. For three months, no, two months, I was hired by the Americans to do two jobs each day. One was taking dead bodies of Japanese, and throwing them in the trucks.
- Willens: Picking up dead bodies.
- Camacho: Yes, picking up dead body, yes, dead Japanese body. I worked at that for five or six hours. Then for three hours they sent me up to the PA system.
- Willens: To the what?
- Camacho: PA system, the loudspeaker. Public address. We were calling the Chamorro or the civilians to come out from the caves, to be safe and come out.
- Willens: Were most of the civilians still hiding?
- Camacho: For some it is very hard, because they believe in the propaganda. The Japanese said when Americans caught a man they are going to shoot. When they caught the woman they are going to do something, intercourse, whatever they call it. After that they kill the girl. So some civilians were scared of the Americans.
- Willens: Did you believe that?
- Camacho: No, I don't believe it.
- Willens: Why did some people believe it and other people didn't?
- Camacho: Well, it depends on their life. How much the Japanese were strict to him or something like that. But me, as a serviceman, already I call myself a serviceman, I know it's not true. I don't believe it.
- Willens: I understand that the local people were put by the Americans in so-called internment camps. Could you explain that to me?
- Camacho: Well, the internment camps separated the Chamorro and the Japanese civilians and the

Japanese military soldiers, we call it soldier, serviceman. So they had three different camps. And also they have of course Koreans and some few Okinawans also, who were treated like Japanese civilians.

Willens: Well, why were the Chamorro civilians put into a camp?

Camacho: Well, because they have to protect you from the snipers. Snipers were still coming [into the civilian areas] to shoot someone or to steal something or whatever and then going back into hiding again. So that's why they have to put us in the camp, and put the fences around the camp.

Willens: How long were you in a camp?

Camacho: Approximately 1944 up to 1946 or 1947.

Willens: I heard there was a liberation day July 4, 1946.

Camacho: 1947, 1946 or something like that, yes.

Willens: And were you then released on that day?

Camacho: Right. We opened the fence, the Chamorro camp fence. But the Japanese they were sent home.

Willens: Was the island secure and safe then?

Camacho: Yes. The Japanese had been sent back to Japan. Some civilians were sent to Hawaii. I don't know why, but that's what they did.

Willens: How did you first get involved in Marianas politics?

Camacho: Well, in 1948 or 1949 the United Nations visiting mission came to Saipan.

Willens: 1948, 1949?

Camacho: 1948, something like that. At that time we have already some kind of divisions. You can see the big shots in our people.

Willens: Who were the big shots?

Camacho: Well the old Mayor and people like that.

Willens: I heard that Elias Sablan . . .

Camacho: Something like that, yes. At that time, we know that there are differences among the people already. If you are a leader or you are a big shot, you are above everybody else. During the period of the Japanese time, like I said military time, we had those people [leaders] there. If they don't like an individual, we get more bad treatment of the individual and, like you said, parents, friends, close relatives.

Willens: They got bad treatment?

Camacho: Yes, I mean if you are poor you cannot lead anyone. If you are rich then they go follow you. It's your friends. So during that time I was a little bit young, I think about 20 years old or something like that. So I see those differences when the United Nations came. Sometimes they don't let us go in.

Willens: They don't what?

Camacho: Like a closing door. They don't let somebody get into the meeting. Yes. They chose someone [local] to put in the meeting hall. We were thinking that is not fair, so that's why we created some sort of a party system.

- Willens: You created what?
- Camacho: Party system, party differences.
- Willens: What were the differences?
- Camacho: Well, because you have to be a leader first [to be able to participate in decisions]. So, when you are the mayor and you are trying to do this very strictly or, say, you are not honest in what you are doing. Now you have some enemies. Those enemies [get together]. In this case [the United Nations visit], the enemy is us because we cannot get into the meeting. So we have to find our way to see if we can make some differences.
- Willens: I don't understand that word, what's the word you are using?
- Camacho: Okay, I am using the word like discriminatory.
- Willens: Discriminatory?
- Camacho: Yes.
- Willens: Well, who was discriminating against whom?
- Camacho: You know, the people have differences like poor and rich man, you know, and friend and non-partisan.
- Willens: Were there parties?
- Camacho: There is no political system yet. But you see the differences. You know you cannot fit into their line.
- Willens: So, with what group did you affiliate?
- Camacho: So, I affiliated with the Popular Party. Before we called them Telihula and Telilapa.
- Willens: Those are Chamorro words?
- Camacho: Yes. I don't know how they picked that. So we used our name, Telilapa, and their name is Telihula.
- Willens: Was the Popular Party created before this?
- Camacho: The Telilapa created the Popular Party.
- Willens: I understand that the Territorial Party, I guess, which was called the Progressive Party was formed in 1957.
- Camacho: Well, this was the result of the knocking on our door from the Guam Legislature.
- Willens: What are you referring to?
- Camacho: Well, I am referring to the reunification with Guam.
- Willens: Of the Marianas with Guam?
- Camacho: Right, the reunification of the Marianas [southern Marianas and Northern Marianas].
- Willens: Were you involved in those discussions?
- Camacho: Well, I was not in the Legislature yet, but I am one of the supporters of changing the government.
- Willens: Changing the government system?
- Camacho: Right.
- Willens: Was there a Municipal Council on Saipan at that time?

Camacho: Before I went to the Municipal Council, I was an active participant in those discussions. In 1959, I was in the Municipal Legislature.

Willens: Municipal Council?

Camacho: Right, 1959, 1960, 1961, 1962, 1963. Then in 1963, there was the creation of the Northern Marianas District Legislature.

Willens: Did the Municipal Council have any significant responsibilities?

Camacho: First, the Guam legislators came to Saipan to sit with the Saipan Municipal Legislature or Council. I was not on the Council at that time, but in 1958, 1956, all that period, Guamanians came to Saipan.

Willens: Who came?

Camacho: Mr. James Sablan, about five or six of them.

Willens: These are leaders from Guam?

Camacho: From Guam. So they came over to Saipan, they said, to knock on our door.

Willens: They wanted to persuade the Marianas people to unify with Guam?

Camacho: Guam, with the Northern Marianas, yes.

Willens: What was your reaction to that proposition?

Camacho: Well, it's one solution to changing the system of government. You have to think about what way to go. You have to think because if you were in the Trust Territory, you have six districts there. You have one ship, they called that the Trust Territory. Okay, in that ship, they have six rooms. Six rooms on the ship: the Marianas, Palau, Ponape, Truk, and so forth. Okay, the room called Truk has a big hole developing.

Willens: The room had a big hole?

Camacho: Yes, in Truk's room, they have a big hole. Okay, now considering the budget, who's goes first? The big hole, right, to repair it. In Saipan, we have good roads now, we have good liberty okay? We have a very good standard of living, at least compared to Truk and Ponape. The money [for that] came from the States. But under the [Trust Territory] budget, more money is spent in Truk Island because this is an undeveloped area.

Willens: Some of the people in what became the Territorial Party thought that the Marianas could do better if they negotiated directly with the United States rather than become part of Guam.

Camacho: Yes, but see, we didn't believe that.

Willens: Why not?

Camacho: At that time we didn't believe that because the United States had a commitment to the United Nations [about the Trust Territory]. It would take a lot more time. Reunification is closer. You have to change your system if you wait for direct annexation to the United States. Also, to take away Saipan from the Trust Territory is against the United Nations [policy]. Russia was very strong against us to do that, and Russia is a big voice in the United Nations Trusteeship Council. Many nations follow Russia.

Willens: Did you ever go to the Trusteeship Council?

Camacho: No, I never went there.

- Willens: Well, were the people in the Marianas in the late 1950s and early 1960s eager for change?
- Camacho: Well, see, in the 1950s we have no political voice because Saipan is restricted.
- Willens: It was administered by the Navy at that time.
- Camacho: Administered by the Navy. Not actually the Navy, but maybe the Armed Forces, yes. They sealed Saipan off. You cannot go out without clearance from the, what do you call this, Com Nav Forces Marianas. To go to Guam you have to get permission first.
- Willens: Did you and the others object to that restriction?
- Camacho: Well, you cannot do anything. When they issued an executive order, you cannot fight with this during this period. You cannot fight with the Navy. When they put out an executive order, you have to obey such things.
- You are not free to talk about it or anything.
- Willens: What kind of a job did the Navy do in administering Saipan and Tinian?
- Camacho: You talk about what year?
- Willens: In the late 1950s and up until 1962 when Interior was put in charge.
- Camacho: Okay, in the 1950s, we are a Trust Territory, but we still have the Navy government around. I called that the watching of the Trust Territory government.
- Willens: It's the what?
- Camacho: They're watching the Trust Territory government. The Navy is the top command taking care of the Northern Marianas. Their commanding officer, the Island Commander, is still there, and the Navy is strong. When they say close the place, you close. Like they did with the restricted area over there. They close and seal it. You cannot do anything, no matter how much your Council asks about it. Even if you have a lawyer, you cannot fight.
- Willens: Do you know what brought about the change in U.S. policy?
- Camacho: Well, this is strictly under the United States. We don't know how to go to Washington or talk to someone in the United States, like a congressman.
- Willens: Okay, now I asked you about what responsibilities the Saipan Municipal Council had in 1959 to 1963 when you served on the Council. What did you do as a representative on the Council?
- Camacho: Well, actually it's only just to try to develop the villages and things like that.
- Willens: The what?
- Camacho: The villages, you know, the village, what you live there.
- Willens: Did you have any money to spend?
- Camacho: Well, we had a few local taxes but these taxes only go to education, paying the teachers. Most of the money that we collected at that time, it goes to the school teachers.
- Willens: This was money from the Trust Territory budget?
- Camacho: No, that's local tax money that goes for schools. No, the Trust Territory is another different category. That money does not go to the Municipal Council or municipal government.
- Willens: Well, did the Municipal Council ever consider issues like opening up the Marianas to tourists?

- Camacho: Not at that time. Because it's still sealed. The Marianas Islands are still sealed off. You don't know about any possible tourism. It isn't even mentioned. Nothing.
- Willens: How did you live? Were you farming?
- Camacho: I was working for the Navy. They call it NTTU.
- Willens: What was that, NTTU?
- Camacho: Well, that's a top secret CIA program, I think it is.
- Willens: I see. So you were working for the government?
- Camacho: I was working in 1959 when they came over. I'm the first. They taught me to build up the fire department. But before they hired me for the fire department, they hired me as a store keeper, for Navy supply.
- Willens: Were local people then employed by the CIA?
- Camacho: By the Navy and yes, CIA. I work 11 years for the CIA.
- Willens: I see. I didn't realize that.
- Camacho: At first I worked in supply for the store keeper. Then they hired me to work for the fire department, so I built it up. We bought fire trucks, then I hired men, 15 or 20, then we bought hoses and everything else. We started the fire department for the base only, for NTTU.
- Willens: The fire engines were all to protect the . . .
- Camacho: The base, not the outside Navy base, but the NTTU base.
- Willens: Was it generally known around the island what the CIA was doing?
- Camacho: Well, at first I didn't know anything about the CIA and things like that, because the name of the company is the Asia Foundation Incorporation.
- AFI.
- Willens: That was the name of the company for whom you worked?
- Camacho: For the CIA, yes.
- Willens: Well, was it known what the base was doing?
- Camacho: No.
- Willens: Then at the time you were there in the 1950s and early 1960s?
- Camacho: I working for the security office which includes the fire department.
- Willens: Did you know what kind of training was going on?
- Camacho: Well, yes, because sometimes I trained the same people how to fight fires and how to prevent fires, fire prevention and fire protection. So sometimes I trained those people.
- Willens: I see.
- Camacho: That's Asian Foundation Corporation.
- Willens: Was there a Popular Party in existence at this time then in 1960?
- Camacho: Yes, matter of fact during that period also I was already in the Municipal Congress.
- Willens: Who were the other colleagues of yours who are still alive today who were there?

- Camacho: Most of them are gone. Joe Cruz. I don't know where he is now. He is the guy I replaced. He lost that election.
- Willens: To the Municipal Council?
- Camacho: That time, yes.
- Willens: He was on Saipan at the time?
- Camacho: Yes, right. I think he won two terms. He was working for the Legislature as a cleaning boy and then he got involved in the political group. So he won one time. Oh, and Jesus Sablan, I think Jesus Sablan was there.
- Willens: Who?
- Camacho: Jesus Sablan, you know, Mayor Sablan's brother? Now I think he is at the Grand Hotel, a manager.
- Willens: Which hotel?
- Camacho: Saipan Grand Hotel.
- Willens: Jesus Sablan was on the Municipal Council?
- Camacho: Yes. Oh, and John Reyes, yes, Dr. Reyes.
- Willens: Is he still alive?
- Camacho: Yes.
- Willens: What persuaded you to run for the first Marianas District Legislature?
- Camacho: Well, when we created the District Legislature, we on the council ran for the District Legislature.
- Willens: All of the members of the Council ran for the District Legislature?
- Camacho: That's right, yes.
- Willens: Some made it and some didn't?
- Camacho: Some didn't, yes.
- Willens: I see. Ben Santos became the president of the first District Legislature and served in that role for many years.
- Camacho: Until they closed the Legislature.
- Willens: Was he one of the leaders in the Popular Party?
- Camacho: Yes. He was chairman also sometimes.
- Willens: What is your recollection of him as a young man?
- Camacho: Well, still, now he's still a good man and he is very [much a] champion.
- Willens: A champion?
- Camacho: Yes. He should be the Governor today, too. He could run for Governor, or Mayor at least. I have confidence in Ben Santos. He really works for his people. He likes people here. And a clean, clean office, too.
- Willens: Did the District Legislature have more power and responsibility than the Municipal Council then?

- Camacho: Oh, yes. Yes, because we were appropriating the government money. We appropriate the budget.
- Willens: How much of a budget would you have?
- Camacho: Oh, well, it's not too much. Maybe at that time it's not even \$200,000 or something like that, you know.
- Willens: Was the District Legislature a paid job?
- Camacho: They were paying us very low actually, but you have to take your annual leave from the government when you were working [with the Legislature].
- Willens: It was not a full-time job?
- Camacho: No, I think [it met] three times a year.
- Willens: The Popular Party gained a majority in the District Legislature. Is that correct?
- Camacho: Yes.
- Willens: Was status, that is, future political status, one of the important issues that divided the parties?
- Camacho: Yes, that's what I said. From the beginning, we were having visits by the Guam Legislature, and then we went to Guam to negotiate more closely. They selected us from the Legislature to go [to Guam] to discuss particular ways of reunification.
- Willens: Is that what the reunification committee was all about?
- Camacho: Yes.
- Willens: You were a member of that?
- Camacho: Right. I was a member there.
- Willens: How long did that committee remain in existence?
- Camacho: I think it was still going until the Covenant negotiations got going. I resigned from the District Legislature in 1967.
- Willens: You resigned in 1967?
- Camacho: Right. Because I have the appointment by the District Administrator, Peter Coleman, to be his representative in Tinian.
- Willens: I see.
- Camacho: In 1967.
- Willens: And how long did you serve in that capacity?
- Camacho: Until 1969, summer of 1969.
- Willens: And then did you run again for the District Legislature?
- Camacho: No. I just quit politics and tried working my farm.
- Willens: What kind of business have you been in for the last 20 years?
- Camacho: In 1970, I created the Saipan Farmers' Cooperative Association after I came from Tinian. I learned in Tinian that many of these farmers can be more productive and can get money, and also can help the people. At that time, I believed in the soil, how much it is worth.
- Willens: Did you believe that the soil could be productive?

- Camacho: Yes, indeed. So I asked assistance from, they call it CAA, the Community Action Agency, here in Saipan. I asked their volunteer service to get me one old man, a retiree, I don't care how old, to teach me how to start the cooperative.
- Willens: Did Tinian have, in your opinion, better agricultural prospects than Saipan?
- Camacho: Yes, because the soil is more available, more flat area, the farms area, than Saipan.
- Willens: During the 1950s and 1960s, occasionally studies would be conducted here and the Northern Marianas recommending that there be more agriculture and more local fishing. Did you think that those recommendations could ever be implemented?
- Camacho: Those books that they wrote many of these missions that came over here for these agricultural things and lot of inspections and a lot of investigations—those books are worth nothing. They don't do anything on it.
- Willens: The books don't do anything.
- Camacho: No. It doesn't work. The government doesn't follow that. Until now the Agricultural Department is really not very much help to us.
- Willens: Do people here want to engage in agriculture?
- Camacho: Well, they do like to get agriculture more developed, but those people are now gone.
- Willens: Those people are now gone?
- Camacho: Yes. Like my father, and all the old timers.
- Willens: The older people who wanted to engage in farming?
- Camacho: Right.
- Willens: Most of the younger people want to do other things.
- Camacho: Right, but my age group, they like to have farms. Matter of fact, the new generation coming up like Mr. Flores, Donald Flores, those young guys start farming now.
- Willens: How would you compare the two political parties in terms of their appeal?
- Camacho: Well, the Territorial Party is still the same way. Of course, everybody wants to develop the island, to get more [investment].
- Willens: Get more what?
- Camacho: To develop the islands. But inside the government [when the Territorial Party was in office] like we said, family government. It was family for government office or family government, not really for the people.
- Willens: Not really for the people?
- Camacho: Yes, because they hired all their families in the different jobs.
- Willens: But isn't that generally true of politics in the Northern Marianas?
- Camacho: Yes.
- Willens: Of both parties?
- Camacho: Both parties. But the other party has been neglecting a lot of the Carolinians before.
- Willens: Who has been neglecting the Carolinians?
- Camacho: The Territorial Party.

- Willens: Now the Carolinians for the most part are supporters of the Territorial Party, is that correct?
- Camacho: Some still go there. But some maybe go Democratic now.
- Willens: I am just trying to explore why the Popular Party was the predominant party in the 1960s, and specifically was it because of political status or was it because of their views on economics or other matters?
- Camacho: Something like that. There are more benefits. They produced more economic ventures. There was more balance, that type of thing.
- Willens: More balance?
- Camacho: I would say that we had more economic production. We have more ways to do that during the Popular Party administration.
- Willens: During the Trusteeship, the Japanese could not invest here directly at the time.
- Camacho: No.
- Willens: Was that a political issue for you and the others?
- Camacho: No.
- Willens: Did you agree with that policy?
- Camacho: Well, actually, no, I did not agree with it. We believed that the United States doesn't even say good afternoon, I'm here to help you. Whoever was here in the [government] service, they weren't going to come back.
- Willens: So far as you were concerned, you wanted to have anyone here who would invest money and help develop the island?
- Camacho: Something like that, yes. I believe more to appeal to foreign people, because I don't believe the United States businesses would come over for any other reason, unless maybe they have a business together with the foreign people in Japan or Korea. Maybe those kinds of businessmen can come over. But I didn't really believe that United States people would come over to invest their money.
- Willens: How long were you on Tinian as the District Administrator's representative?
- Camacho: Two years, three.
- Willens: What were your duties there?
- Camacho: I was responsible for all the taxes collected in Tinian's office and also school meetings. As a District Administrator, you are responsible for all the government employees, salaries and everything else, the Municipal Council.
- Willens: When was it that you and others in the Popular Party decided that unification with Guam really wasn't a possibility?
- Camacho: Well, we believed we were getting closer to being unified, but then, I think after I resigned, they had the, what do you call it, plebiscite.
- Willens: They had a referendum.
- Camacho: Referendum or plebiscite, I forget what they call it at that time. That referendum has not reached all the people in Guam. When we visited Guam, sometimes we went around like campaigning, all of the villages, talking house to house. Not all, but most of the spots we went, they were happy.

- Willens: Did most people support reunification?
- Camacho: Right. Because they believed that the Chamorros [on Guam and in the Northern Marianas are] one people, our cultures are the same most the time, so they are happy to do this. But when they have the plebiscite, the legislators there who have been appointed by the Legislature in Guam [to do political education] never make it to Balesu or Matak, on the back side of the island.
- Willens: Never did what?
- Camacho: Never campaigned there for the plebiscite.
- Willens: Legislative representatives, appointees never campaigned in referendum?
- Camacho: Right. Not even favor it or not favor it.
- Willens: Was the Legislature officially in favor of reunification?
- Camacho: Right. That's why they put the money in for the referendum. But, when they campaign before the referendum, they don't reach much of the population about the reunification of the Marianas. There is not enough communication to ordinary people. Do you know what I mean? There is no wide campaign. The only areas they went to are like Tamuning, only in the front part of the island. But on the back side, they are innocent, how much is good, how much is bad. Their legislators don't even know how to explain it. That's why I said there are many people over there who thought it doesn't make sense to go down and cast their vote.
- Willens: It didn't make any sense, in Guam?
- Camacho: Right, in Guam, right. So they don't show up.
- Willens: When you heard about the results of the referendum, what was your reaction?
- Camacho: Well, the reaction is, man, let's get going another way.
- Willens: And what did the Popular Party do to pursue another way?
- Camacho: So we decided we need the direct annexation to United States, or just asking to release us from the United Nations Charter. Under that [the United Nations charter], it was either independence or not, see, so we wanted to have another political choice to see how much closer we can get [to the United States]. The choice that we can make is only two, to have people be satisfied, still to be a Trust Territory or to be annexed by the United States. So we [in the Popular Party] needed to be going to the United States.
- Willens: Some people in Saipan and the Northern Marianas thought that if they reunified with Guam, that they would be a minority and that economic and political power would be held by the Guamanians.
- Camacho: That's true.
- Willens: Was that a concern you had?
- Camacho: Well, yes. But, I still didn't believe that 100 percent, maybe 75 percent I can see it in some ways, but there are differences [in being a minority under these circumstances] because we have same culture, we speak the same language. Because we have seven islands, and they have only one, you can challenge them. So, we are not same like Yumarak.
- Willens: Same as what?
- Camacho: We are not like Yumarak, one of the villages there. I know for sure that Guam cannot see us as just one of their villages.

- Willens: So you think the Northern Marianas would have been a more substantial political force if reunification had happened?
- Camacho: Well, of course. That's more than you can say for staying in the Trust Territory.
- Willens: Once you changed your view about reunification with Guam, did that make the Popular Party position on political status the same as the Territorial Party?
- Camacho: No, actually, it did not, because [the Popular Party thought] you have to negotiate in a different way.
- Willens: Well, explain that to me, I don't understand.
- Camacho: Well, the Popular Party [wanted]—if you are going to have this [negotiation] with the United States—annexation. So we have our differences on how much can go on first before they're asking for the releasing of the United Nations Charter. [The Popular Party wanted] the closest [relationship] to have us become part of the United States family. That's the one first fight that we tried to . . .
- Willens: That was a Popular Party objective?
- Camacho: Right.
- Willens: Did the Territorial Party basically want to stay within Micronesia as a whole?
- Camacho: Yes. Some of them.
- Willens: What do you think were the principal reasons why the people in the Northern Marianas wanted a closer relationship with the United States as compared with other districts in the Trust Territory?
- Camacho: Well, in the Northern Marianas I don't know how to say this, but we were farther ahead, closer to the United States, than Palau or Truk, you know.
- Willens: Was that because you're more economically advanced?
- Camacho: Right. More economically advanced, right.
- Willens: Is that because you're also more Americanized because of the government developments here?
- Camacho: Right, right. That's the most important reason we are asking to be in United States political family.
- Willens: Some people have suggested that the Marianas was concerned also about being a part of a unified Micronesia because they would be only one of six districts and they might not have the power to determine their own destiny. Do you have any reaction to that?
- Camacho: No. I believe even though today we are in a commonwealth system of government, I still believe that the United States is looking to these particular islands to be in one group.
- Willens: To be what?
- Camacho: One of the Territory group. They can see the whole group.
- Willens: You think the United States still wants to reunify the Northern Marianas and Guam?
- Camacho: Guam and Palau and Ponape and Yap and everything.
- Willens: You think that's still the United States' aim?
- Camacho: That's still the United States' aim.
- Willens: How do you know that?

- Camacho: Well, this is only my opinion. I think that is why the system is the way it is now. Of course, the people can be so different today than tomorrow. Their legislature or the Congress of United States will all be changed, but I that is what I'm predicting myself, that's my opinion, that the Americans are still looking at the whole, to get Hawaii to be the central federal government for the whole United States territory out here. Not Washington, D.C.
- Willens: I see.
- Camacho: This is only my prediction. This is year 2007 or 2010.
- Willens: Some years off in the future.
- Camacho: Yes. In dealing with the United States government, you would not keep on going to Washington and all that, no. They're going to look to Hawaii. So this area, all the Trust Territory, and including Samoa. They're going to be American and the boss is the Hawaii state government. Not to give us a one star, no I cannot believe that. We're going to be right on that Hawaii star in the U.S. flag.
- Willens: That was a proposal that was advanced some twenty years ago.
- Camacho: Do you know that too?
- Willens: There was a proposal to annex the Trust Territory to Hawaii.
- Camacho: All that, even the American Samoa.
- Willens: I didn't hear that, but that could have been the case. Did you have any connection with the negotiations that led to the Covenant?
- Camacho: No, sir.
- Willens: Do you have friends on the Marianas Political Status Commission?
- Camacho: Yes, like Ben Santos and Eddie Pangelinan. I know everybody.
- Willens: You supported the Covenant when it was signed by the others?
- Camacho: Of course. Because, just like I said, I have been looking to see Saipan be changed to a different way of government. Because I don't believe in the Trust Territory or want to stay in the Trust Territory. Because just like I said, for example, the one ship here.
- Willens: The one ship.
- Camacho: Yes. We're on one ship, this is called Trust Territory. If the money goes to the Trust Territory, the money is going to be divided into the more populated area. Like who's the biggest population? Truk. So the money goes there. Saipan maybe gets one-fourth. The rest [of the districts] maybe half, you know.
- Willens: Looking back now on the last 15 years, what do you think have been the principal strengths of the new Commonwealth government. What have been the accomplishments?
- Camacho: Well, for the first three or four years, you cannot see much accomplishment. For three or four years, no, you cannot see much accomplishment. Under Governor Camacho, you cannot see any jobs being done, anything.
- Willens: I don't understand you.
- Camacho: For example, the highways. You cannot build a road on the amount of budget that we have.
- Willens: You don't think there was enough money made available for roads?

- Camacho:: No. So, since that time we have learned that we have some rights and privileges in the States. So we start this highway fund, the State's highway fund. Also water.
- Willens: Water?
- Camacho: Yes. For all the facilities we have, you know, water and power.
- Willens: Are these all federal programs that the Commonwealth has taken advantage of?
- Camacho: Right, right.
- Willens: You think they have been important?
- Camacho: Right. Right. So those things have been asked for during the Camacho Administration because when we were in the Trust Territory we cannot ask for those. Because when you ask, they will give you only one [amount] to divide into six districts.
- Willens: You think the Commonwealth had more influence in getting federal funds once it was part of the United States.
- Camacho: Yes, sir. That's the time I believed that America is committed to our Constitution and also our Covenant. So we know we have that right and privilege. At that time, the Camacho Administration, we asked for those privileges. Now we are benefiting. Governor Guerrero, now, is benefiting. All those requests that have been done from the Camacho Administration.
- Willens: How about the extent of economic development in the Northern Marianas and particularly the number of alien laborers. How do you feel about that?
- Camacho: Well, in some ways the alien labor is really helpful for the people here 12 years or 16 years ago because, like I said, the United States doesn't give us much of a good education.
- Willens: It does not?
- Camacho: Well, no because you cannot get more than college. You cannot go on to study more than college.
- Willens: When, under Commonwealth or earlier?
- Camacho: No, earlier. Before the Commonwealth.
- Willens: Under the Trust Territory?
- Camacho: Right, under the Trust Territory.
- Willens: I see.
- Camacho: So with all those [fields] neglected, we could not develop ourselves. Like I said, no skills. Not even engineering, much of it. Maybe one or two. But we cannot say that we have engineering skills or carpenters or lot of proficient trades. All those things were not available before. That's why we need to hire the foreign people with skills. Now even, I cannot hire anybody in Saipan, cannot hire anybody to farm.
- Willens: Why not?
- Camacho: They don't want, no, you cannot find people to farm.
- Willens: Can't find anyone who wants to be a farmer?
- Camacho: I don't know why. They don't want a dirty hand. Not even the guys who started in school 10, 15 years ago. They graduate and today are already what, 25 years old, and they don't want to go into farming. They learn in school how much the farmers benefit, but they

never believe it.

Willens: Well how do you feel about all the tourists and the large hotels? Do you think that gives off benefits to the Commonwealth citizens?

Camacho: Well, speaking of tourists, yes it's good. Yes, that's good because you know you have a lot of money coming in. But, like I said, we have some disadvantages in the development here in Saipan today.

Willens: What's that?

Camacho: For example, the foreigner now who's losing his job or already owns land and has his own house, now some foreigners say we hear they have food stamp program [in the Marianas]. They take their benefits and also burden the infrastructure.

Willens: Are they losing their jobs and leaving the island?

Camacho: No, I'm not talking about laborers who have job, but people who come here to get into business. There's no way to make any more money. The economic situation is very low today, right? So they just leave and go back home. Like Koreans, for example. You see old apartments there, nobody living there.

Willens: Were you concerned about too many alien laborers on the island?

Camacho: No, I said that money's not available for a lot of people who came over to get into a business. Too many people came here to start businesses.

Willens: What do you think have been the principal shortcomings of the Commonwealth administration over the past 15 years? What do you think the Commonwealth government should have done that they haven't done?

Camacho: Well, many things. But I cannot give you much of an answer because, you know like I said, I am already retired and I am not involved in anything anymore. I just think here how many more years for me to live, so I just stop being involved in anything on this.

Willens: But you're a knowledgeable observer.

Camacho: I am not much involved in observing now in this government here, because, you know like I said, I just put myself as independent in life now, as an old man. I am retired.

Willens: Do you have children?

Camacho: Yes. They are married.

Willens: They are all married? Did they stay on the island?

Camacho: No. Five are in America.

Willens: Five are in America? How many children did you have?

Camacho: Fourteen.

Willens: Fourteen, and five of the fourteen settled in the United States.

Camacho: Right, five.

Willens: Did many of them go to college?

Camacho: Four of them went to college.

Willens: Do you think that generally there is more economic advantage for the younger people to go to the United States?

Camacho:: No, I told them to come back. There is more here than living in the States.

- Willens: Some agreed with you and some didn't agree with you.
- Camacho:: Right. Well, it depends on how they live. I just invite them to come over, because we've got land, people can build a house, all the benefits here they have homestead grants, things like that. They lose all these privileges because they are living there. They cannot get any homestead.
- Willens: You have a homestead here.
- Camacho: Village homestead, yes, I do have, but not a farm homestead. Now I am renting a piece of land from the government. It is cheap, but it is the only way we can do some farming.
- Willens: Have you tried to stay apart from this Article 12 dispute?
- Camacho: I don't want go into that because I am satisfied with the Constitution. The Constitution is the right direction.
- Willens: Okay. Can you think of anything else you would like to tell me about the 1960s or the 1970s?
- Camacho:: I have only a short time now. I will pick up my daughter at school. I wish I could come back again and talk to you more, but time doesn't permit us right now. I appreciate the chance to talk with you.
- Willens: Well, thank you very much for your time. It's been very helpful.