

INTERVIEW OF VICENTE T. CAMACHO

by Howard P. Willens

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- Willens: Vicente T. Camacho, better known as Ben Camacho, was a member of the Marianas Political Status Commission and had an active career in public life during the 1960s and 1970s. Ben, thank you very much for agreeing to be available today for an interview. As I mentioned, this is for a history of the Northern Marianas and we appreciate very much your willingness to be of assistance. Could you begin by giving me some background information about where you were born, and your early years at school?
- Camacho: Thanks, Howard, and welcome to Saipan again. I was born in Garapan on April 5, 1929, and I was raised with my parents until I got married. I grew up in Garapan. I have six brothers and one sister and I went to a Japanese school. And at the same time, after the Japanese school I also attended Doctrine, where you learn about how to read, how to pray, and how to obey. All the Catholic teachers were local and some of them came from Spain. Sisters of Mercy.
- Willens: Was that education available under the Japanese Administration?
- Camacho: Yes.
- Willens: Were both of your parents born in the Marianas as well?
- Camacho: Precisely, yes. My father and my mother were both born in Saipan.
- Willens: How does your branch of the Camacho family relate to other branches of the Camacho family?
- Camacho: Okay. As far as my memory is concerned, when my father was telling us children about how the Camacho family started in Saipan, he mentioned there was only one Camacho who came from Guam and three Sablans. That is the beginning of the Camacho family at that time. That was Juan Camacho.
- Willens: Approximately when do you think that Juan Camacho came to Saipan?
- Camacho: Probably in the 1600s, I think, if I'm not mistaken, way back.
- Willens: You're going back that far?
- Camacho: Yes. Somewhere back when the Spaniards were here. And they grew up here. In fact, nine years ago, we had a Camacho reunion on the islands and we had a big party, a big celebration. We had a mass in the morning, all kinds of events.
- Willens: How many Camachos turned out?
- Camacho: There's something like 500 men and about 300 women.
- Willens: I see. That must have been quite a party.
- Camacho: And all these were Camacho by last name. As a woman after you're married, your Camacho last name disappeared so that you would take the new husband's name. I think it's the same thing in the United States and elsewhere—so we're losing a lot of Camachos that way. But if the Camachos have a lot of boys, they again have a lot of Camachos in the future.
- Willens: Camacho is one of the largest family groups on the island, is it not?

- Camacho: Yes, Camacho and Sablan, of course. These two are the largest families. And to tell you the truth, I don't know which is larger, but maybe Sablan is more by persons, but if you divided by three—since Sablan started with three here—and if you divided that into three groups, then of course you can see that the Camachos are much larger.
- Willens: Have the Camacho men and women generally been aligned with the Popular Party that became the Democratic Party or have they turned up with both parties in the last 20 years or so?
- Camacho: Well, not all the Camachos are one-sided. There are a lot of Camachos in other parties like the Popular Party and the Progressive Party. But if one Camacho is seeking votes, you know, going around campaigning house-to-house, when it comes to family ties, then of course some of the Republican Party is supporting his cousins or brothers or close relative in the Camacho family.
- Willens: Under the Japanese Administration, as I understand it, you and other local children received only five or six years of education. Is that correct?
- Camacho: That's right. For the women, they only allowed us to have five years. And now for the men you have one more year; that is an option, you know.
- Willens: Did you take that extra year?
- Camacho: I did, in fact. Well let me start with first grade when I attended school and see what I can remember. In first, second and third grades it was hard, and I was trying really hard to catch up on the Japanese language. I concentrated on that in school. But some math also, like addition, subtraction, multiplication, division and all that. They teach the same thing exactly what we're using today.
- Willens: I see.
- Camacho: So it's very useful. And I was concentrating on speaking Japanese.
- Willens: Well, was Japanese language a mandatory subject for the local students?
- Camacho: When I got to about the fourth grade, that's the time that the Japanese started. It was not really forced on us in 1940; there was no mandate for us to speak Japanese. But 1941, 1942 and 1943 were the worst years because they forced you to speak Japanese everywhere, even at home.
- Willens: How did that come about?
- Camacho: Well, the teachers at the school ruled that no one in the class could use their local language. Even if you're going home, you have to use Japanese with your mother and father, but that is really impossible. We try hard to do it, but sometimes we had to lie to the teacher because if you say that I never use Japanese at home then they'll punish you. This is how strict the Japanese teachers were at that time.
- Willens: What was your general impression of the Japanese Administration as you were growing up in the 1930s and the early 1940s?
- Camacho: The 1930s were fine. The only problem I remember at all were the rules for the Chamorro people, rules and regulations. In other words, the government issued rules and regulations that are strictly for Chamorro and Carolinian people who are living with the Japanese at that time. It limited [us from] high positions at the school, high positions at work, and you're not allowed to purchase or drink liquor. The years 1940 and 1941 were the worst part, when the Japanese start to take our liberty. In other words, we cannot live in a relaxed and comfortable manner because the Japanese rules restricted us.

- Willens: Was that related to the fact that the war began with the United States in 1941?
- Camacho: In 1941, yes. After that everything was really a hard life.
- Willens: Some of our mutual friends have told me that they and their families were relatively friendly with the Japanese who lived on the island. Sometimes they were neighbors and the Japanese people did act in a friendly fashion toward the local people. What is your recollection?
- Camacho: Well, before the year of 1941, relations were very close with the Japanese. I feel like we are in a family group. Everywhere you go, everybody's friendly and helpful. But after 1941, the times really quickly changed. 1942 was the same. And 1943 was even worse because there's a lot of propaganda. Japan was in, I think, Singapore or Malaysia. There were some places where the Japanese already are, you know, prepared for the war. And propaganda reached the Japanese. Because we have Spanish family names and our language is similar to Spanish, the Japanese suspected us. The relationship between us Chamorros and the Japanese was starting to get farther, farther apart, because they suspect that we are spying against them.
- Willens: Did your family live in Garapan during the war years?
- Camacho: Yes, I think virtually all of the Chamorros and Carolinians were living in Garapan. Not all, because some of the Carolinians and Chamorros were living in Tanapag. Those were the two towns on the island. After the Japanese established the sugar cane area, they built up a sugar cane factory, and they started building up a town there. I think one, two or three Chamorros who worked for the sugar company had living quarters in Chalan Kanoa. But other than that, the major town is in Garapan, the second largest is Tanapag, which has a very small population.
- Willens: Did your family have any agricultural land in another part of the island?
- Camacho: Yes. That's how we get our food. My father has a huge piece of land, and he raised sugar cane at the farm. When the time comes to harvest the sugar cane, they all cooperatively go in a bunch to determine what land will be harvested that day. So everybody then goes as helping hands.
- Willens: All the Chamorros and Carolinians?
- Camacho: Chamorros, Okinawans, and Japanese, too.
- Willens: Was all the sugar cane being sold to the Japanese?
- Camacho: Yes, for the sugar factory there.
- Willens: Well, was that a full-time occupation for your father to farm that land?
- Camacho: My father's full-time occupation is the farm.
- Willens: How did he come in to own that land? Had that been in the family for many generations?
- Camacho: That's right.
- Willens: And where was it located?
- Camacho: Our farm is located in San Roque. Now it's San Roque but before the place was called Matansa.
- Willens: How do you spell that?
- Camacho: M-A-T-A-N-S-A. Matansa. I think the Spaniards named that area. Matansa means in

Spanish “slaughterhouse.” So it must be in Spanish time or German time, those people who want to kill a cow have to take it down there and slaughter it there. Maybe that place had become a slaughter area, so they named it Matansa.

Willens: Does the Camacho family still own that property?

Camacho: The majority of the Camacho family is in Matansa in San Roque. Yes, some is leased out but the majority is still owned. There is some Camacho land in the Capitol Hill area, here also in Gualo Rai. The Camachos are a big family; they are spread almost everywhere.

Willens: When the United States forces invaded Saipan in 1944, were you and your family given advance warning that an invasion was likely to come and that you should leave Garapan?

Camacho: I will come back to that, Howard. You asked me about life from the beginning. While we were attending school, some of our classmates were selected to go further in school after five years. Graduation here is after five years. Some of them went to Palau to further their education in skills like carpentry or public works—you know, like grounds and labor or mechanic—because there’s no school here in Saipan.

Willens: Did you do that?

Camacho: No, I didn’t do that but five or six of my classmates attended that Palauan school.

Willens: I see. Well after you completed your years with the Japanese educators, is that when you began the training with the Catholic order of sisters?

Camacho: No, I was attending the Catholic training ever since I was in first or second grade. We were only attending about four hours of school and sometimes the school group will assign you to stay behind to clean up, you know, up to three o’clock. Some people who’d been cleaning the schoolhouse, after three o’clock they have to go straight to church because the sisters are there waiting. And, of course, we attend mass also every Sunday, my family and I together. Unfortunately, after 1942, the Japanese mandated closing up the church, the Catholic church. They wanted to occupy that [building] so they moved us from the church. They forced us to hear the mass at the Sisters’ convent, because they have to use the church building as a warehouse for food and military supplies.

Willens: Are we talking about the church that is now Mt. Carmel?

Camacho: No, the church now in Garapan. The Garapan church. It’s almost the size of Mt. Carmel church; it’s not big as it but almost.

Willens: I see.

Camacho: At the Garapan church there’s a bell tower still standing there—exactly where the Garapan church was before the war.

Willens: After you completed your education, did you go to work for your father?

Camacho: First, I was asked by a teacher to work for a small restaurant. So I worked in the restaurant for about seven or eight months, a Japanese restaurant.

Willens: How old were you at the time?

Camacho: I think I was about 12 or 13 years. After I was a graduate from the fifth grade, I decided to attend the sixth grade school. In the school for the sixth grade, this is almost 100 percent teaching you how to become a soldier. They trained for everything in Japanese, they taught us how to do that, too.

Willens: You and your classmates in that sixth year of education would be approximately how old, 14 or 15?

- Camacho: About 13.
- Willens: So you and the others were being trained in certain military skills at that rather young age?
- Camacho: That's right.
- Willens: And then what happened after you completed that sixth year?
- Camacho: After the sixth year is completed, that was 1944 already. Our lives at that time really were pretty bad because there were a lot of restrictions. They moved people out of Garapan to stay at the farms. The Japanese wanted to use the Garapan area completely for themselves. They're desperate to move us out because they need Garapan for their usage.
- Willens: And did your family leave Garapan under those circumstances?
- Camacho: Yes, everybody had to leave because this is a mandate, whether you have a farm or not. If you don't have a farm, you have to share with your relatives or close friends. The Japanese government was not responsible to build shelter for the people who don't have a house, you know. In Garapan, everyone had a house. But when moving out to the farm area in the mountains, there is no building, no house to stay there, so unfortunately for those people who don't have a house and farm, they have to share or find some place. Some people even stayed in a cave, I guess.
- Willens: That's what I understand.
- Camacho: Some people like us had two houses, one in Garapan—in the city—and one at the ranch house. Our ranch house had almost everything completed. We had sufficient water there and everything. We have vegetables and a pig, chicken, and all that, so for us there is no suffering. But people who don't have that, I understand, suffered all the time. So at that period of time my father was mandated by the Japanese military to work. Some people called it forced labor. Someone mentioned forced labor, but I don't know whether that's true. As far as I'm concerned, my interpretation of force is like coming out with a gun and pointing it at you: "Come on, you have to work!" This is what I say is forced labor; but it was mandatory that you have to work for the military.
- Willens: What were you required to do?
- Camacho: Some people like my father and other old people were drafted there to work for them while they built As Lito Field.
- Willens: That's As Lito Air Field?
- Camacho: Yes, As Lito Air Field. That was the major air field in Saipan. And some people worked there. My father worked there all this time. That left nothing at home. I'm responsible for the rest of my family, my mother and my younger brothers.
- Willens: Were you the oldest in the family?
- Camacho: I am the second from the oldest, but my older brother was staying with my grandparents. They lived in the Fina Susu area, way south. We're living way north. I am the oldest, so I have to take care of my younger brothers and sister. So I planned things at the farm, and I did exactly what my father had been doing. During that time I was approached by the police, Chamorro police, who worked for the Japanese police. They came to my ranch and told my mother that they had to take me to the office because there was a mandate that the Japanese are looking for two persons, me and my classmate.
- Willens: Two people out of your class?

- Camacho: We were selected by the Japanese military.
- Willens: To work with the Chamorro police.
- Camacho: To work for the Japanese.
- Willens: I see.
- Camacho: In fact, that place was, in Japanese they say “kempei.” That’s either intelligence or military police. I don’t know which is which, but it was a very restricted area.
- Willens: And so you were required to go into that line of work?
- Camacho: I have to report. Two of us were selected, and we came down to report.
- Willens: Who was the other person? Do you remember?
- Camacho: His name is Henry C. Pangelinan. He’s dead. He passed away in Guam. He was in Guam during the war.
- Willens: I see.
- Camacho: He lost his life there.
- Willens: What happened to you when you started reporting to work for the Japanese?
- Camacho: I was trained how to read the map, and I had to follow the map and get to the place where I supposed to go. And things like that. And they trained us how to deliver a message.
- Willens: Messages.
- Camacho: I delivered messages by bicycle. And I had, what you call that?
- Willens: Armband?
- Camacho: Armband, yes, for the people to respect that when you’re coming, they won’t stop you, especially if [they are] Japanese soldiers. If you don’t have that, you cannot go into a military area. So you have to have that.
- Willens: As you recall it, was this in approximately 1944, the year of the invasion?
- Camacho: 1944.
- Willens: Were you engaged in this kind of work when the invasion occurred?
- Camacho: I worked for only about three months. After the heavy bombarding started, I was lost and everybody was lost.
- Willens: Was your property damaged by the invasion?
- Camacho: Not so bad. Of course, many of the coconut trees were down and bananas and some other crops that were growing up. But other than that—like yam, potatoes, sweet potatoes, and taro—there’s not much damage. But the problem is that after the war is over, they gather everybody from the mountain area and bring them down to the camp. And that’s it, you lost everything right there.
- Willens: So, you were in the camp then for what, nearly two years?
- Camacho: No. For most of the people, I think, it was nearly two years but for myself, after I was transferred to the camp, about a week later I was selected to work for the Navy sanitation department.
- Willens: Sanitation Department of the...
- Camacho: U.S. Navy. I worked for about two weeks there, and I was transferred to work for the U.S.

- Army Station Hospital. We called that the 369 Army Station Hospital, something like that. I worked there for about two years.
- Willens: What did you do there?
- Camacho: Well, I was assisting the nurse and the doctors. First we have to do the cleaning of the floors. They trained us how to do all the jobs.
- Willens: Did you know English at the time?
- Camacho: No, I didn't know anything about it at that time, but we had a class at the work site.
- Willens: At the work site they would have a class?
- Camacho: At the work site they would have a class. Our group worked for 369 Army Station Hospital, and they housed us there. We only got one day liberty to go home and visit and come back the next day.
- Willens: So you'd work six days a week?
- Camacho: No. I worked more than that.
- Willens: Could you elaborate on some of your impressions actually during the bombardment?
- Camacho: Yes. The first bomb we ever had here was February 23, 1944. That was the first plane that came and dropped a few bombs here. A couple of bombs were dropped at As Lito Field and I think that one or two bombs were dropped into Garapan where the tank storage is.
- Willens: Tank storage meaning?
- Camacho: Oil.
- Willens: Tanks of fuel?
- Camacho: Fuel, yes. And there were one or two oil tanks burned and also some small fuel tanks were burned at the airstrip, As Lito Airstrip. That was February 1944. I stayed at my grandfather's for about a week at that time. The school children, although there's no school at this time, have to report. We have to go down to the Oleai area and help all the Japanese soldiers renovating or making an airstrip in San Jose. So Chamorro students and Japanese students all make their own working party. I was too far from San Roque, Matansa, to Oleai, so I had to stay with my grandfather here in As Lito. That's the time when the American planes came down. I don't know whether they're fighters or bombers but they were carrying small bombs. My godfather at that time was with my grandfather. He was very happy and he said: "This is the time we're going to eat cheese and butter and bread." I don't know how my godfather knows that, but he's very happy because now the times are changed and we're going to be living with the American people. He shouted there, you know, and he was happy. And my grandfather was too. I was there that morning. Early in the morning around six o'clock, the planes came here and bombed the As Lito area. My grandfather was telling my godfather: "Please, Joaquin, just be silent," because there's a lot of Japanese around this area. "When they hear that, they're going to shoot you." And he said: "I don't think nobody can shoot me." He didn't shout it that time, but he was killed during the invasion.
- Willens: He was killed during the invasion?
- Camacho: My grandfather was killed by the Japanese.
- Willens: Was killed by the Japanese?

Camacho: Yes. He was. My grandmother, my grandfather and my aunt, two aunts and two brothers. We stayed with them and several other families, the Guerrero family, you know Tony Guerrero. My father was living in that area. They were hiding in a cave, not in a cave, but a foxhole. He built a hole. And there were a lot of people in that hole, and it was very hard to breathe. So my grandfather is old, and he tried to go out and get some fresh air. Right then a Japanese soldier was out there, and he saw my grandfather going out for fresh air. He was shot. That time's pretty bad. I also lost an uncle, this was in Matansa, during the invasion. A lot of people were scared, not going anywhere because Japanese soldiers were scattered all over the island.

Willens: Because Japanese soldiers were all over the island?

Camacho: All over the island. So you cannot travel during the day, actually, because if you go by them they will kill you or grab you and tie you up. We can't just freely go walk around.

Willens: You could not walk around during the day? But it would be a danger if you walked around at night?

Camacho: I know. A lot of people lost their lives that way. In the north part of the island, it was worse. The marines landed on the southern part of the island, and they occupied that area. They had huge big guns facing north to our area and used these guns. So we in the northern part were blasted by guns from our own land in the south and also by the guns from the ships. There were big guns everywhere.

Willens: And those bombardments were hitting your farm land where you were living at the time.

Camacho: Yes. In our farm area, I built a foxhole, we call that a "bokugo." You build it and prepared everything for shelter underground. The shelter that I built with my brothers was huge, it was big, and I think it was very strong.

Willens: What are you calling it? What is the name you're using?

Camacho: In Japanese language we use that term "bokugo." I think the military used that to mean a foxhole or something like shelter, bomb shelter. Actually that's what it is.

Willens: Did it protect you?

Camacho: Yes. And not my family alone. During that time a bunch of families came here. Joe Tenorio's family, and his brothers and sisters, and a lot of the Tenorio family from the As Lito area crawled around all the way down to the Matansa area. That's where we are. They showed up in my area, so we accommodate them to use our bomb shelter. We had underground tanks, that's the rain water, so that's my farm house water supply. At that time, the [water level in the] tank was lower because there hadn't been rain for quite some time. It's not quite dry but a couple of feet, or one foot from the ground. There were so many staying there in our shelter that we who owned that land, we had to go up to my uncle's house in that area. At my uncle's house, there is a small cave, so we fixed that cave and we survived there, hiding in that cave. If you go up there maybe you say: "Oh, Ben, you cannot fit 12 people in here." But you believe me or not, there were about 22 people in that cave. It was really jammed.

Willens: Did you have food and water?

Camacho: We have sufficient food, but we lacked water. I'm the oldest in that group except my uncles, so I have to crawl out at night and get some young coconuts and get that water for cooking and drinking. You have to do that to survive and to supply the people who were with us. During the day there's a bombing that flattened the Matansa Japanese school.

That was also used as a military warehouse so a lot of food was packed in the school. We knew that it was blasted by the bombs, so during the night we went down to get some food. We had a lot of food there. Canned goods, rice, even corn in the bag and beans in bag. But we didn't worry about that. We only grabbed that fast food, you know, like canned goods, you only have to open it up and eat it, even without cooking it. So, we were going down there, helping ourselves to that scattered food all over the school area. So, hell, plenty of food there.

Willens: That was all Japanese property though?

Camacho: Yes.

Willens: And they had not provided any guard for their property?

Camacho: Well, even the Japanese guards and soldiers were helping themselves too, so they don't bother who's coming to get it. Everybody's looking out for their own lives so they don't bother, you know. But on the way going to and from, my uncle was held up by a couple of Japanese. I think it was more than a couple. He was arrested by them, hands up and everything. They took everything, including his clothes, to inspect my uncle to see if he was a spy or carrying U.S. items with him. And he had nothing, so he was released. But he was beaten by the Japanese, who said: "Who told you to walk around," you know. So that happened. A couple of nights right before the American marines were coming to our area to free us, there's two groups of Japanese who came into our area. The first group was telling us that we have to move further to the north end. And I ask why. He said: "You don't ask why. We mandate you to leave, so you must go." My grandmother on my father's side is with us. My grandmother and my grandfather on my mother's side were where my older brother is in a separate shelter. My grandmother on my father's side is old. She speaks fluent Spanish. She can hardly walk, so I asked permission from that group of Japanese soldiers to please leave us alone, you know, and they gave us a pretty hard time. I don't know why, but somehow I was still carrying that armband.

Willens: The armband.

Camacho: I was very fortunate to remember that. I had that in my pocket, so I pulled it out. After everything scattered, I had been wearing the same clothing for two or three days. So I put that here [on my sleeve] and I walked out. The moment I walked out, he was surprised, and he said to me: "Where did you steal that?" Then I respond in Japanese, and I say: "I don't steal it, I work for the military." And he saluted me and he said: "Well, I'm sorry. We have to go."

Willens: So they left you where you were?

Camacho: Yes.

Willens: Because you had the armband and could speak Japanese?

Camacho: Right. And they didn't bother us at all. Then the second group came the next night. They are a very soft group, you know, not like the first group that was mandating us to leave. He said, "Are you guys okay here?" I said: "Yes, we're so far so good." He said: "Do you have enough supply and everything?" They made a very good approach to us. And finally he asked me whether we have a lot of rope. Rope, you know, manila rope? I said: "No, we don't have rope here." I asked why, and he said there's a couple thousand American prisoners starting down in the Kagman area.

Willens: Kagman?

Camacho: Kagman, yes. He was saying there were a couple thousand American prisoners of war.

- Willens: Who had been captured by the Japanese?
- Camacho: Captured by the Japanese and there is not enough rope to tie them up.
- Willens: So he was asking you for rope to help them tie the American prisoners?
- Camacho: Then I said: "I'm sorry, I don't have any rope here." Before this group left he gave me two hand grenades. And he said: "You know how to do this?" I said: "Definitely, I was trained to do that." And he said: "You got one there?" And I said: "No, I don't need to carry that because I'm not a soldier, although I was trained to do the soldier's thing, but I'm not a soldier yet." And he said: "Well, anyway, take these for your own safety. In case some American comes to try to destroy you, you can throw this at them." I say: "Okay, thank you, maybe I can use it."
- Willens: So you took the two grenades?
- Camacho: I took the two grenades and, after they left, I dug a hole an hour away from us, and hid them down there.
- Willens: Did you have any fear that the Americans were going to abuse you if they captured you?
- Camacho: Well, I had a feeling that we are not their enemy so maybe we could survive. My grandmother was telling us that the Americans are closer to the Spanish. They're European, she said, and the European people are very kind; it's not like the Japanese. The Japanese were kind before, but now they are not kind. They treated us as animals and I think the Americans, or English, or Spaniards, well they are good.
- Willens: What happened? Were you, in fact, discovered by some American troops?
- Camacho: Yes. In the middle of the afternoon about three o'clock on July 7th.
- Willens: How do you happen to remember these dates so clearly?
- Camacho: Well, because when we got to the camp, then I worked for the sanitation department. I kept track of the date. It's only about a couple of weeks away, so I remember July 7 as the time that U.S. Marines came up to our area to get us.
- Willens: They came to get you when you were in the cave?
- Camacho: Yes. The night before the American Marines came near our area, the night was very silent and we can hear some bombs and other gun shots away from our area. The north was bombed, I don't know whether Marine tanks or ship guns, but not in our area there. And I didn't know why our place was very silent that night. The next morning around 8 o'clock in the morning, I think, some gun shots started, a lot of gun shots. This is machine gun and tank and rifle fire above us in the mountain area. And also in the southern part towards the Tanapag area, there was no bomb noise, only rifle and machine guns. Nobody wanted to go out because we can hear a lot of guns shooting so we were hiding in that cave all day until around three o'clock that afternoon.
- Willens: In the afternoon.
- Camacho: Well, we didn't hear anyone coming near us because everyone is hiding. And all of a sudden there's a one Marine who knows how to speak Spanish. Oh, before that, my grandma was telling us: "Prepare one stick for us to make a white flag." So we did it. This is about five days before the American came. We were going to put it up on the entrance of the cave we have. So we didn't put it up there [at first]. On the day when there was that silence early in the morning when we wake up, my grandmother said, "Put it up the white flag." So I tell her: "You better not because Japanese may be coming down and may shoot

- us.” She said: “No, just raise up, raise up the white flag. That means peace.”
- Willens: It means peace in Chamorro. It’s a sign of your willingness to surrender.
- Camacho: Yes.
- Willens: And so, did you do it?
- Camacho: So, yes. There was a white flag hanging out in the entrance of our cave.
- Willens: Did you personally go hang it?
- Camacho: No, I didn’t do it. My brother did it.
- Willens: Okay.
- Camacho: He was told by my grandmother to do it. And all of a sudden, there’s footsteps coming around in that area. They saw that white flag at the entrance of the cave, and he speaks in English first. But everybody was afraid inside, so no one responded. So, he spoke in Spanish.
- Willens: What did he say in Spanish?
- Camacho: I don’t remember what did he say. I didn’t hear exactly what he said. But my grandma responded to it.
- Willens: She responded in Spanish?
- Camacho: Yes.
- Willens: And what do you think she said?
- Camacho: She says: “Yes, we are all Chamorro.” I think the Marine was asking us whether you are Japanese or local or something like that, you know? I don’t know what he said—but she said: “Yes, we are all Chamorro. And we need peace.” So he must be saying: “Come on out, we are American.” I don’t even know how to speak Spanish, I don’t remember what the Marine was saying to us but my grandmother responds and says: “We are all Chamorro.” So he says: “Come on out.” So we started coming out, you know, every one of us coming out.
- Willens: How did you feel?
- Camacho: Looking around, there’s no trees, everything was down. I don’t know what to say, Howard, but I feel like I’m in the clouds, you know. I feel blind, is this true? The Americans are here? And where are they taking us? So, here, my grandmother was speaking to that soldier again and he said: “We are going down to where the rest of the Chamorros are on the other side.” And my grandmother said that we are all safe, we’re going back with them. They’re going to take us down to where the other Chamorros are. The soldier would speak again to my grandmother, and I believe he’s saying that: “Are any Japanese soldiers around in this area?” And my grandmother said, [s]he translated it to us, and [s]he said: “He is asking if there is another Japanese soldier around this area?” We said: “No, we don’t know.”
- Willens: You replied: “No, we don’t know because we had been in the cave?”
- Camacho: Yes.
- Willens: Then what happened?
- Camacho: Then they start picking us up on the hill on the Garapan side of the mountain because the trucks already were up there.

- Willens: On the north side of the—where the caves are?
- Camacho: Yes, upper San Roque, on top of the mountain, that's a flat area there. That is also part of our land.
- Willens: Part of the Camacho family land?
- Camacho: Yes. And we were very surprised that the Marine trucks, about six or eight of them, were already standing by there. I think they must have been holding people, Chamorros from the mountain. When they took this area, they found the Chamorro civilians. They put them in the trucks and moved them down to the camp.
- Willens: Camp Susupe?
- Camacho: Yes. I think it's their job to come down there and stand by for hauling people down. So we went down there and we rode in the truck. They gave us water first. And the water we drank at that time—we are very thirsty because lack of water—but the water we drank at that time didn't feel safe because it looks dirty, it's not clear water. But the soldiers are drinking it. They show us that it's okay, it's safe to drink, so we drink. We went down to the camp. They were using the back roads there, some places are very narrow. That road was built by the Japanese. It's very narrow and there were some cliffs. But this truck driver knows, I think, already where they pass by there. When we arrived in the Susupe camp, there were a lot of Chamorros and Carolinians waiting for the truck to come.
- Willens: Did you see a lot friends and family?
- Camacho: Many people were just crying. And many people just shouting. They're glad that you're living, and: "Oh, we are here, we are here," it's all the reaction at that time. People were crying. Crying for happiness. They took us down to live in tent houses. Yes, it's quite a story.
- Willens: You mentioned earlier that you worked at the hospital?
- Camacho: Yes, 369 Army Station Hospital. We were assigned to the ward, you know, medical ward. At that time, it was only a tent. We were assisting a nurse at that time. On Sunday we only worked in the morning. I attended class before lunch, and after lunch we just relaxed, until the evening comes for supper time. We assisted feeding the patients, holding the food for the patients. I was there for a little over one year.
- Willens: What happened when you were liberated from the camp?
- Camacho: When they released us, we were free to go because the island was clear. Even after the war, they were still a lot of military. They shifted them around Garapan, so they didn't allow us to go there. For our safety's sake, I think, they don't allow us to go down there because there were still some mines and other dangerous things laying around there. So, until everything was clear, I think about one year, it was still not allowed to stay out of the camp. We would go out, but we had to come back.
- Willens: I see.
- Camacho: And not individually freely to go out, but by group, yes, we can go and come back.
- Willens: How do you think that the Americans generally treated the local people in the camp?
- Camacho: Well, I say that it was fine because they provided us food, water and some candies, some clothes. People go out and found some unused or used clothes or new clothes and they bring everything here to ration to the people. Everything is free because we have no stores. The lady who could sew made dresses and things. They used a blanket or sheet, bed cover

for that. I'm not too familiar with it because I was stationed at 369 Station Hospital for over a year. I heard that from my wife and my mother. I don't know much about the camp area.

Willens: Okay, then let's turn to the time when everyone was free to leave the camp in 1946 and you were free to resume your normal life here on the island. Did you continue your education at that time?

Camacho: Yes, by night, adult education.

Willens: What did you do?

Camacho: I worked for Procurement and Supply.

Willens: For whom?

Camacho: Procurement and Supply.

Willens: You were working for the Naval Administration?

Camacho: Naval Administration. Yes. After the 369 Station Hospital, I was transferred down to the Officer's Mess Hall. You know what the Officer's Mess was?

Willens: Dining hall.

Camacho: Yes, the dining hall for the American officers. I was selected to serve the high ranking table, like commanders and captains.

Willens: About this time you were 17, 18 years old?

Camacho: About 15, 16, I think.

Willens: And how long did you continue doing that?

Camacho: I think about another year.

Willens: And then what did you do?

Camacho: I was again transferred. I was transferred to work for the Supply Department, Naval Supply Depot. And I worked in the Naval Supply Depot for I think about eight or nine years.

Willens: I see. What kind of positions did you hold there?

Camacho: Well first, I was trained how to drive, and I drove a jeep. I was carrying mail, so I was assigned to a mail room in the Naval Supply Center. I'm carrying the mail from the Post Office to the base and disseminate this into the boxes there. I was trained how to work in the Post Office. And later, I was interested in driving a bigger truck. At age 17 years, to drive something bigger than a jeep. So I asked my boss, I want to drive a big truck. He said: "No, it's no good for you, I think you're better here at the Post Office." I say: "Yes, it's okay, but someday I'm gonna drive a truck." So about three months later he say: "Sure you still want to drive a big truck?" "I say, yes!" He introduced me to the truck drivers area there, so I was tested for a truck driver and I passed for heavy equipment outdoor, not the crane and bulldozer at that time, only a 6x6 GMC cargo truck handling, a trailer, you know, low-boy.

Willens: So you drove those large trucks?

Camacho: I like to drive, and I was driving the big trailer.

Willens: How many years did you work for the Naval Administration?

Camacho: I think about nine years.

Willens: And so you worked for them until some time in the mid-1950's?

Camacho: Yes. When I was driving the truck, my boss was telling me, since you are so fluent in English, speaking good English, they would like me to become a supervisor rather than driving a truck. At that age, I don't like to be a supervisor. I like to be moving around and driving heavy equipment and all that. Anyway I was assigned as a supervisor to FTB, Freight Transshipment Branch.

Willens: FTB?

Camacho: FTB, Freight Transshipment Branch, in the Supply Department, United States Navy. I was assigned there to supervise, and I was trained how to do all the storekeeper's job. So I was in that supervisor capacity all the way up until the time I would become a politician.

Willens: When did you first become engaged in politics?

Camacho: 1959.

Willens: And how did that come about?

Camacho: I was appointed by Mayor Benavente. The original legislative body on Saipan at that time was the Saipan Congress and House of Assembly. They changed dramatically.

Willens: They changed its name periodically but it had been established under the Naval Administration some time in the 1950's?

Camacho: Yes.

Willens: And so there was a Mayor.

Camacho: I think even before that, but I was not involved in politics at that time, you know. First was in 1947, I think that's the time when they start with a Mayor and Saipan Congress.

Willens: And that was Mayor Sablan?

Camacho: Elias Sablan.

Willens: He was the Mayor for many years as I understand it.

Camacho: Yes, but the first mayor was Gregorio Sablan.

Willens: He was before Elias Sablan.

Camacho: Yes.

Willens: Gregorio Sablan, and then Elias Sablan, and then Mr. Benavente.

Camacho: No, after Elias, I think, it's Juan Ada.

Willens: I think there was an Ada, I think you're right.

Camacho: Yes. Juan Ada was also for short period of time the mayor.

Willens: And then ...

Camacho: So after that, Benavente.

Willens: What was his first name?

Camacho: Ignacio.

Willens: Ignacio.

Camacho: Ignacio V. (as Villagomez) Benavente.

- Willens: Did you have to run for election or did he appoint you?
- Camacho: No, I was appointed.
- Willens: The positions were elected positions, though.
- Camacho: I know.
- Willens: Was it a vacancy or something?
- Camacho: Yes, because of the creation of the District Legislature. I was appointed to fill a vacancy because some of the members had been elected to the District Legislature. This is Trust Territory time, I guess, and people who'd been elected to serve in the District Legislature had been in the Saipan Congress, the municipal legislature.
- Willens: The Naval Administration lasted until 1962 when the Interior Department took over responsibility for Saipan and Tinian.
- Camacho: That's the second time.
- Willens: That's right. And then in 1963 the Marianas District Legislature was created because the Marianas had not had a District Legislature before that.
- Ben, you mentioned that you recalled some additional facts about your education during the Japanese Administration. Could you tell me what you had in mind?
- Camacho: I don't remember everything when I was in first grade or second grade, but when I came to third grade then that's the time I think that I was concentrating on education things. I really concentrated on my studies and what the teacher told us. I tried to study hard and found that I made it to the graduation time. The third grade, that's considered as grade school, and the fourth and fifth are considered as intermediate school, in Japanese time.
- Willens: I see.
- Camacho: So in third grade, at graduation I was elected to read the play, we call that in Japanese, "Toji".
- Willens: Was that an honor that was given to the student who had the highest grades?
- Camacho: That's right.
- Willens: And so you were the student in the third grade who was given that honor because of your achievements?
- Camacho: That's right, that's correct.
- Willens: Did you continue to be a good student in the intermediate school?
- Camacho: Of course I did, and I tried hard. I was interested to learn almost everything that I can, even farm work or fishing or carpentry. They don't teach us much in the skills like carpenter, electrician, and plumbing; there's no such school available at that time. Other than that, reading and mathematics and all these things. So in the intermediate grades, we call that intermediate after third grade, I also had a pretty good record, and I was elected the president of the school. Also in Japanese time they have two teams of, they don't have that in English, but in Japanese they are called "kanse."
- Willens: How do you spell it?
- Camacho: Kanse. K-A-N-S-E. That's similar to like you go around in school and catch something bad and mark name down and report to the teacher. Things like that. It's more like a supervisor.

Willens: Well in the stateside system I think sometimes they refer to those students as being a monitor or patrol people.

Camacho: Yes. It's something like that, yes, I think that's what it is.

Willens: Focus on the 1950's for the moment and I'd like to ask you about the formation of the political parties in the Northern Marianas. Were you involved in the first steps toward creating a political party in the Northern Marianas?

Camacho: Yes, not as a leader, you know, but as a citizen. I joined the political party. I think the party was formed in 1947 and that's the first political party ever created in Saipan. That's the time we voted for our mayor, if I'm not mistaken.

Willens: You recall a political party being created as early as the 1940s?

Camacho: No.

Willens: As I understand it, both the Popular and Territorial Party (which may then have been called the Progressive Party) were formed in the late 1950's.

Camacho: Yes.

Willens: But there may have been a political party earlier?

Camacho: Yes.

Willens: I'd like to hear your best recollection.

Camacho: They have some elections, then you have to choose the candidate. I consider that as the beginning of the political movement. But party-wise just for the fact that the family who is involved with one candidate, they grouped themselves and are seeking votes.

Willens: Well, before there was a formally organized Popular Party and a Progressive Party did the different families tend to have different political positions? I mean, for example, did the Camacho family generally vote together and support the same candidate?

Camacho: Yes. But not 100 percent. Among the Camachos, some still have friends closer to the other candidates so they tend to sacrifice the support in the Camacho family in order to get a better continued relationship with this person who votes for the other candidate.

Willens: Once the Popular and the Progressive parties were formed, did you affiliate yourself with the Popular Party?

Camacho: Yes.

Willens: What caused you to do that?

Camacho: Well, the platform had been presented to the public at that time and we wanted to support our positions as to be with one nation. Because in the past, Howard, there's no political system and we don't know where we belong. In other words, the Japanese Administration's been there ever since I was born. I heard there's a German time, and a Spanish time. After the Americans came, there's an American administration. We wondered who we're going to end up with in the future. Who will be the next nation to affiliate with us?

Willens: Did you expect that you would be independent or would have your own political status in the future?

Camacho: No, at that time there's no looking for independence. I was among the ordinary people at that time, but I was strongly involved in supporting the Popular Party because I believed in its platform. The platform of the Popular Party was to be integrated with Guam and the Territorial Party platform is to be freely associated with the United States. Myself, I believe

that the easiest and the fastest way for us to become part of the United States is to join with Guam because, in the Marianas chain, the United States is already there in Guam. I think we all understand that it would be easy for us to be given the same system as Guam or to reintegrate and join with Guam.

Willens: What was attractive to you about reintegration with Guam?

Camacho: At that time all of us were attracted by [the idea that] if we join with Guam then, of course, we automatically get the same benefits and same privileges that Guam has. I think that's the people's thinking about it at that time.

Willens: Many of the people who wanted to reintegrate with Guam emphasized the desirability of becoming U.S. citizens. Was that a goal that you had in mind for you and your family personally?

Camacho: Yes.

Willens: Well, what did you think would be the benefits of being a U.S. citizen?

Camacho: Well, compared to our experience in the past during the Japanese Administration, that would leave me with no choice but to say that we are limited in the freedom we had in the Japanese time. I know that in education and also in employment the Japanese didn't give the Chamorros any upgrades in their rank on the job, and didn't provide higher education. Look for instance, I mentioned that we only got the fifth grade and if we were lucky we had one more year awarded for the students to advance. But that's it, you cannot go further. Now I didn't mention it in my previous answers that other than the government school.

Willens: Under the Japanese time?

Camacho: Japanese, yes. There's a side school, in other words, a night school. I joined them, too. I went to night classes to get more [education] but I cannot learn much at the Japanese government school. So that's the thing, Howard, we the Chamorros didn't have full privileges during the Japanese Administration. For instance, the older people always mention that the Chamorro people are not allowed to buy or to drink liquor. And you cannot apply to a higher position at the job. And there are many other things that the Chamorros were limited in. So we consider (I think) to look for a better future. We feel that the Americans have a high capability to assist us on our island here.

Willens: Did you have relatives on Guam?

Camacho: Yes, we do have relatives but not as close as my first cousins. It's only about second cousins and third cousins.

Willens: Did you personally have the occasion to visit Guam from time to time?

Camacho: Yes, in fact after we decided to join with Guam, I privately visited the friends whom I know best and we were talking about we the people from Saipan wanted to join with Guam. The reaction of my family there encouraged me, because it is a good idea that we are going to get together again. In Japanese time we have been separated because they are under the Americans and we are under the Japanese. We are separated due to the Japanese mandate. So, they are happy to see me and to hear that we really want to become part of Guam.

Willens: And when you visited them during the 1950's and the early 1960's, did it look as though the people had a higher standard of living and more opportunities?

Camacho: Yes.

- Willens: Let me turn then to the political organization in Saipan. We talked earlier about when you became part of the Saipan Municipal Council. Do you recall now exactly when and how you became part of the Saipan Municipal Council?
- Camacho: Yes, I believe, if I'm not mistaken, because you know it's been years and years ago, but I think that was either 1963 or 1964 when they created the District Legislature. I think that most of them who had served in the Municipal Legislature (or Council) joined in running for the District Legislature. They left the vacancies in the Municipal Legislature. So that's the time I was appointed by Mayor Ignacio Benavente to fill one of these positions.
- Willens: So you remained in the Municipal Council for many years, isn't that correct?
- Camacho: Yes, all the way up until 1976.
- Willens: And it was in 1976 when you were considering running for mayor?
- Camacho: Yes. Let me clarify this. The understanding of the Marianas Popular Party at that time was that since I've been serving in Municipal Council for many years and I was also serving as Speaker of the Council (at that time we still called ourself the Saipan Legislature)—I was elected as Speaker for three or four terms, if I'm not mistaken—the party strongly recommended me to become the next mayor after the expiration of the mayor, Vicente D. Sablan. When the nomination date came for the Popular Party, I was expecting the Party will be getting together, have a selection of the candidates for the mayorship and the Municipal Council. Unfortunately, at that time the chairman of the Popular Party is somehow reluctant to call a meeting.
- Willens: Reluctant to what?
- Camacho: To call a Popular Party meeting to nominate the candidates for the mayor and the Municipal Council. So, the Party waited and waited to be called. A lot of people who supported me were very anxious to see that I be officially nominated as the candidate of the Popular Party for the mayorship. So everybody waited and waited and the time passed until it's too late to call everybody to a meeting because the election day is closer and closer. We don't have time to prepare for proceeding properly. To my surprise, everything turned to a different feeling because the Ladies Association, which was the strongest group within the Popular Party, supported a different movement. One of my opponents in the same Party, Mitch Pangelinan, was interested in running for mayor.
- Willens: Was he the head of the Democratic Party at the time?
- Camacho: Sort of. Either President or Chairman, whatever, but he's in a high position in the Popular Party. He was also a member of the Council. So, somehow I am surprised that Mitch never came up to tell me: "There is some development going on," you know, in term of the changing of the candidate.
- Willens: Did the Ladies Association support him?
- Camacho: The Ladies Association had a meeting. I don't know how this happened. I'm assuming that either the Chairman or the President of the Party approached the Ladies Association to call a meeting and select a candidate. They want me to drop it and have Mitch be the candidate. But it was too late because my supporters, over 500 people supporting me, strongly wanted to support the Popular Party's earlier promise that I would be the next mayor when Sablan's term expired.
- Willens: And so what happened?

- Camacho: The Ladies Association strongly supported Mitch Pangelinan. Not all of them, but there's a lot of people supporting the Ladies Association. So the election went on and the Popular Party had two mayor candidates, myself and Mitch Pangelinan. The Territorial Party only had one candidate, I think his name was Luis Benavente. And with the three of us running, we know that we're not going to make it. We cannot make it because in order to win you need only one candidate from the parties. You know that with two candidates for the same Party, there's no way for either of us to get it.
- Willens: Wasn't that unusual to have two candidates from one party run?
- Camacho: Yes, that's unusual and I don't know why that came up that way.
- Willens: Did you and Mitch ever sit down and discuss whether one of you should withdraw?
- Camacho: No, it never happened.
- Willens: Was the Ladies Association always a powerful force in the Popular Party going back to the early 1960s?
- Camacho: I would say yes. The Ladies Association mostly is the mothers in the families so they have influence with a lot of friends and all that to support their intentions.
- Willens: Did the Territorial Party have an active ladies association?
- Camacho: They do have a ladies association but I don't know what they call that. I don't really remember, but they do have also a women's group.
- Willens: But your recollection is that within the Popular Party the women's group was a powerful force?
- Camacho: At that time, yes.
- Willens: Very few women chose to run for political office, though, isn't that correct?
- Camacho: That's correct.
- Willens: Why do you think that was during the 1960s and the early 1970s?
- Camacho: Why there are not many women running? Well, that's a good question. I think at that time they considered that the man really has more power and more flexibility, so I think maybe that's what it is. Not like today, you know. Today women are coming up, they even wanted to join the political parties. Look, for instance, at the Constitutional Convention. There's quite a number of women there.
- Willens: Was the Congress of Saipan the place where young politicians first got their start in the Northern Marianas?
- Camacho: Yes.
- Willens: Ben, did at-large elections made it difficult for the Carolinian community to be represented.
- Camacho: Yes. At that time very few, very few among the Carolinians wanted to become involved in the political organizations.
- Willens: Why do you think that was?
- Camacho: I don't know. There's no discrimination whatsoever. I think that they really did not want to jump in and, you know, show people that they also have a feeling. There's no people really who wanted to come up except Dr. Kaipat and Felix Rabauliman.

- Willens: I'd like your help on that point. Let me show you a copy of the list of the members of the Congress of Saipan in 1957. Are any of those members of the Congress in 1957 of Carolinian descent?
- Camacho: Dr. Palacios' mother or grandmother is from a Carolinian family. That's why I think Francisco T. Palacios his T stands for Taman and Taman is a Carolinian name.
- Willens: How do you spell that?
- Camacho: (Spells it out.) T-A-M-A-N. Taman.
- Willens: I see. Is there any other name that you see in the 1957 Congress that is of Carolinian descent?
- Camacho: Yes, there is Juan Tagabuel.
- Willens: That's (spells it out) T-A-G-A-B-U-E-L?
- Camacho: Yes.
- Willens: But the other names such as Sablan, Diaz, Camacho, Guerrero are all Chamorro?
- Camacho: All Chamorro.
- Willens: Is this where Olympia T. Borja first got his start as a member of the Congress of Saipan?
- Camacho: I believe so.
- Willens: Now, let me just turn over to the next year, 1958, and the members of the Saipan Legislature. I note the name of Jose R. Cruz. Is that Joe Cruz who later served on the Marianas Political Status Commission?
- Camacho: Yes.
- Willens: He was a resident of Saipan at the time?
- Camacho: Oh, yes.
- Willens: Now, do you see any new names here of Carolinian descent?
- Camacho: I think at that time it's only one Tagabuel that's been a member of that.
- Willens: Did you know Joe Cruz well when you were in politics together?
- Camacho: Oh, yes. I know him very well. In fact, I know almost everyone in the islands. Quite a number of Carolinians also. I am well aware of them.
- Willens: Let me show you another year, 1960. Here there are a few new names. Felix Rabauliman.
- Camacho: Yes.
- Willens: Did you know Felix as a young politician?
- Camacho: Yes, he's a young politician and so are J.R. Cruz and Vicente N. Santos. My brother was also deeply involved in politics.
- Willens: Your brother was Leon T. Camacho.
- Camacho: Yes. He's ahead of me, a member of that Saipan Legislature, Saipan Congress.
- Willens: Did he remain active in politics for many years?
- Camacho: Yes. He lost one election or he just terminated it himself and was not running for the

- Congress; so the next higher position my brother would get is being appointed as District Rep in Tinian.
- Willens: He served as representative of the district administrator on the island of Tinian? Did he live on Tinian?
- Camacho: He stayed there, lived on Tinian for several years, I don't remember how many years, maybe four, five years.
- Willens: Was he an influence on you with respect to going into politics?
- Camacho: Well, he and I had been, of course, talking about lots of things that we can help improve our political system, economy, and everything in fact.
- Willens: Did you have other brothers and sisters who became active in politics?
- Camacho: No, no.
- Willens: Looking at the list of the members of the Saipan Municipal Congress in 1960, were most of those members from the Popular Party?
- Camacho: The way I look at it, still the majority is from the Popular Party.
- Willens: I believe there was a Territorial or Progressive Party at the time and I think, but I'm not sure, that Felix Rabauliman may have been a member of that party at the time?
- Camacho: Well, I think he is. Rabauliman was strongly in the Territorial Party.
- Willens: Are there any other members of the Territorial Party that you see?
- Camacho: I think there is another person there I forgot to mention, Felipe Ruak.
- Willens: That's Felipe Ruak. R-U-A-K.
- Camacho: That's right. He's also a Carolinian and he's been pretty active in political parties.
- Willens: Is he still alive today?
- Camacho: And also Benusto R. Kaipat.
- Willens: Yes, is that Dr. Kaipat?
- Camacho: Yes, Felipe Ruak is still alive, and unfortunately Dr. Kaipat has passed away.
- Willens: Did you know Ben Santos before he ran for the Municipal Council?
- Camacho: Yes, I knew him. In fact, if I see the list of all those serving as the Saipan Legislature the Municipal Legislature, I know every one of them.
- Willens: Who were the leaders of the Congress at the time? I notice Juan P. Blanco was the speaker.
- Camacho: It's Juan "B." Blanco
- Willens: I'm sorry, Juan B. Blanco.
- Camacho: Juan B. Blanco, he was the Speaker of the Saipan Municipal Congress.
- Willens: It looks as though it's a list of people who subsequently became leaders in the community.
- Camacho: That's right.
- Willens: Are there any of them particularly that you recall having a impact on your thinking with respect to the Northern Marianas?

Camacho: Well, if I look at all this list there's Vicente D. Sablan, he also served in the Saipan Congress. At that time the mayor was Ignacio Benavente, but after Benavente's term been expired or he decided to be retired, he's the one that was selected by the party to become the mayor of Saipan.

Willens: Vicente D. Sablan?

Camacho: Sablan, yes.

Willens: And did you support him in his campaign as mayor?

Camacho: Unfortunately, he was on the different party, but the question you said, "did I support him?" We did because of the recommendation of the former mayor, Ignacio Benavente.

Willens: So, Vicente D. Sablan was a member of the other party?

Camacho: Territorial Party, yes.

Willens: I see.

Camacho: But he became a Popular Party member after being nominated or recommended by the former mayor, Ignacio Benavente, and from there on he's been with the Popular Party all the way.

Willens: Turning to the 1961 list of members of the Saipan Municipal Council, I see that Jose A. Tenorio is a member and I see that in the next year, 1962, I see that there is also a Jose C. Tenorio. Jose C. Tenorio was Joeten, is that correct?

Camacho: That's correct, yes.

Willens: How did Joe A. Tenorio distinguish himself from Joeten?

Camacho: Well, since Joeten's name was Joeten, abbreviation of Joe Tenorio into one word, and Joe A. Tenorio's family wants to get his name becoming popular too, so he named himself as Joe Eleven.

Willens: And did people, in fact, refer to him as Joe Eleven?

Camacho: Yes, yes. He's been quite well-known as Joe Eleven. And, in fact, the other Joe Tenorio been named as Joe Twelve but that may not be, didn't go through. The Joe Tenorio that I just named is the brother of the former Governor Pedro P. Tenorio.

Willens: Which Joe?

Camacho: You mentioned Joeten, you know, and Joe Eleven, and there's another Joe Tenorio whose name was Joe Twelve.

Willens: And he was the brother of Governor Pedro P. Tenorio?

Willens: In 1962 the Municipal Council indicates that Francisco C. Ada became a member. Was he at the time a member of the Popular Party or the Progressive or Territorial Party?

Camacho: On this I believe he was a Territorial Party, yes.

Willens: Was he someone that you worked with closely during the 1960's?

Camacho: Frank Ada?

Willens: Yes.

Camacho: Well, when I was at the Saipan Legislature, he was the District Administrator. I know him very well because all our municipal ordinances and resolutions have to be submitted

to him. At the district level, he is the final person to present any action that we make through the Saipan Congress.

Willens: Well, what was your assessment of him as District Administrator?

Camacho: During my tenure as Saipan Legislature Speaker, things that we passed were submitted to the District Administrator for him to approve, and there's a lot of things he disapproved. The reason is lack of funds. But there's a lot of things that I was frustrated about. I was frustrated at such a leader who turned down our proposal even if it was good for the people of Saipan. He'd turn around and say, they're good intentions but unfortunately there's no money, so I have to disapprove. But you know, I think he should set aside a day and perhaps he can write a letter to us or to me and say, that's a good intention but we have to start putting some funds aside, you know, to generate it until we have sufficient funds then we do it. There's no Texas road today because that road no longer exists.

Willens: Which road?

Camacho: The Texas Road.

Willens: I don't know where that is.

Camacho: That was the second road towards Oleai, San Jose down to Chalan Kanoa. And that Texas Road was very usable and very helpful, especially today in this heavy traffic. The only access we have from Garapan to Chalan Kanoa, I mean, from Oleai to Chalan Kanoa is the main road. Now, if we had that Texas Road going on, you know we could reduce the traffic. That was a road at one time and we asked the administering authority to give us a little money to improve the Texas Road, and that's why we send the resolution to the District Administrator, seeking help to see if we can improve that road. And they turn around and say I'm sorry, no money. Not only the roads, there's other proposals we have, but lot of things involve money. And, of course, we don't have enough money at that time; we're very, very limited of funds.

Willens: Were you basically limited to funds that were raised through local taxes from the people on Saipan?

Camacho: Yes.

Willens: What was your general impression of the TTPI Administration in the early 1960s when you first got involved in politics?

Camacho: Well, we had lot of recommendations requesting the High Commissioner to grant us some money to improve our schools in Saipan. But at that time, Howard, the High Commissioner cannot only look to Saipan, of course, he has to administer the Marshalls, Truk, Ponape, Yap, what not. So we in the Marianas cannot get the full support of the TT government.

Willens: In 1962 the Interior Department took over from the Naval Administration and thereafter the TTPI Administration moved from Guam up to Capitol Hill on Saipan. As I recall you told me earlier that the people generally thought that they had received more benefits under the Naval Administration. Is that your recollection?

Camacho: Yes, in some part, but not generally. Like for instance, the farmers. We have a good support by the government supporting the farmers, to encourage the farmers. In fact, they have some programs giving seed, fertilizers, insecticides and everything like that. Then after the produce is ready, they contact Guam and the ship owners. Sometimes the Navy ships are carrying our produce to Guam, supporting the Air Force in Guam. And that's how the Naval Administration was a lot of help to our people in the Marianas, because also a lot

of produce came from Tinian as well as Rota. But unfortunately in Rota, the harbor is a problem. You cannot come to get the produce by ship, so it has to go by air.

Willens: Well, what was your personal reaction when the Interior Department took over from the Navy?

Camacho: Well, I have heard that we've been given more than under the Naval Administration. But it didn't improve right away. It was kind of slow and, for your information, even when the President of the United States assisted the TT Government and supported the movement for more development in the whole of Micronesia, we are the minority compared to the other Districts. I understand there were more funds for Micronesia, but compared with the Navy Administration, we had more funds available for the Marianas then.

Willens: During the 1960s some of the leaders here on Saipan were anxious to obtain more economic development on Saipan. The TTPI Administration had some policies that were not favorable toward economic development. Did you personally have any view that policies should be changed so as to develop Saipan more rapidly than it was happening?

Camacho: Yes. Everybody does think we should develop the Marianas.

Willens: Well, some of the people in the Trust Territory were afraid that if there was too much economic development here that the local business people would lose control over their businesses and be facing competition from the States or from Japan or elsewhere. Do you recall having any sense at the time as to whether competition from the outside would be a good thing for the community?

Camacho: Well, I think only a few people can say that, who are business-minded. At that time, yes, we considered the economy would be much better if we have competition from the outside. If we were going to import more farmers here, of course, it's not supporting the economy of the island. But to improve our farm capability here, we needed some assistance from the government and when requesting the government sometimes you will get assistance, sometimes not. I don't know how they divided this money for the six districts, so I still say it's limited funds for each district.

Willens: During the 1960's the United Nations Trusteeship Council every three years would send out a visiting mission to travel around the Trust Territory and file a report with the Trusteeship Council. There were visiting missions in 1961, 1964, 1967 and 1970. Do you have any recollection of meeting personally with members of a U.N. visiting mission?

Camacho: Yes, several times we had the opportunity to meet with them. After the meetings, the same day or the next, we have a reception hosting the visiting missions and that's the time, I think, the only time we can speak person to person. During the meetings you cannot do that. You have to be presenting your positions and it's not a personal conversation; it's a very limited time they have in the meetings.

Willens: Did you ever make a presentation to one of the visiting missions in your capacity as Speaker of the Saipan Municipal Legislature?

Camacho: Yes, several times. In fact, if a visiting mission's coming to visit our island, we have resolutions adopted by the Saipan Legislature, adopted by the District Legislature, and I think they also have a petitions by the district commissioners that were presented to the United Nations.

Willens: Well, can you remember any specific resolution?

Camacho: We were asking for technical assistance, improvement of the hospitals, improvement of

the harbor, more attention for the farmers, and reintegration with Guam. Those are the things that we considered top priority for us to present to the United Nations.

Willens: Well, the United Nations reports that I've read do indicate that the Marianas leaders always urged reintegration with Guam and a separate political status from the rest of the Trust Territory. The U.N. visiting missions always would report back that they try to discourage the people here from reintegration with Guam and tried to encourage the people here to stay with the entire Trust Territory. Do you have any recollection of discussions along those lines?

Camacho: Yes. In fact, that's what the United Nations wanted, the Trust Territory to become one united Micronesia. I don't know what they really planned to do but I know the United Nations, and even the United States, were expecting the Trust Territory to become one country after termination.

Willens: Did you feel that the United Nations visiting mission understood why it was that the Marianas people wanted something different?

Camacho: Yes, they understand that we are different from the Carolinians in culture and religion and they understand that it's kind of hard for us to be with them as one unit. But they really encouraged us to stay within Micronesia as a member of the Congress [of Micronesia]. A lot of voices were heard from the general public that, if we are going to stay with the Trust Territory or stay with the Micronesian as one government, we would be the minority. We'll never get what we are really seeking to improve our economy. If we stay with Micronesia or the other districts, we will never get the chance to get the support we need because they have to divide any available funds equally to each district. That's how we feel.

Willens: Is it your recollection that the United States representatives that you met from time to time also were opposed to any separate status for the Marianas?

Camacho: There was no indication whether they were opposing it or not, but they listened to what our request is and there's no strong opposition or strong discouragement for us when we oppose the other districts. We always strongly recommended to them economically and culturally, we do not fit with the other Micronesians.

Willens: Well, until 1972 the United States always took the position that all six Districts should stay together.

Camacho: Yes.

Willens: And United Nations visiting missions always recommended to the United States that they try to discourage the desire within the Marianas to separate. Did you feel as a political leader in the Northern Marianas that you could achieve your goal of reintegration with Guam or some relationship with the United States even though the United States and the United Nations seemed to be opposed?

Camacho: Yes, we feel that we could and would achieve what we planned.

Willens: Well, why did you think you could achieve it when the United States and the United Nations seemed opposed to it?

Camacho: Well, as a leader at that time, we were all trying to come up with some solutions so we could get out of the Trust Territory government. We feel the United States is the biggest nation that could consider us to be part of their political family. That's why we were emphasizing to the United Nations and the U.S. Congress, petition after petition, resolution after resolution, strongly that the people of the Northern Marianas entirely want to get out of the six districts and be separated from them to become part of the

United States either way—to reintegrate with Guam or through free association with the United States. The political parties have different platforms, but the outcome is still the same. We are looking to become part of the United States, either freely associated with the United States or reintegration with Guam, because we all know that if we become part of the United States then we will be better off.

Willens: Well, did you have any sense in the early and the middle 1960's as to what the other five districts wanted to achieve by way of some future political status?

Camacho: Yes, later on. After they knew that we were seeking to become part of the United States, they also had a proposal to be freely associated with the United States and some districts were proposing to become independent.

Willens: After the Marianas District Legislature was created in 1963 and you became a member of the Saipan Municipal Legislature or Council, you told me you stayed with Municipal Legislature or Council for approximately 12 or more years. Did you ever consider running for the District Legislature?

Camacho: No, Howard, because there's a lot of people already there and I wanted to stay at the municipal level. I still wanted the municipal government to become a solid and important government.

Willens: Did the District Legislature assume responsibility for legislation and distributing funds, public money, that used to be the job of the Municipal Legislature?

Camacho: Not all. We generated some funds in our Municipal budget, too. We were working very closely with the District Legislature because we are requesting the Legislature for some assistance.

Willens: Did you feel that you were fairly treated by the District Legislature?

Camacho: Oh, yes. It was alright as far as my concerns. Saipan was fairly treated.

Willens: In 1965 the Congress of Micronesia was created. Do you recall any discussions in which you participated about whether creating the Congress of Micronesia was going to be beneficial to the Northern Marianas?

Camacho: Yes. I was one of those supporting the movement of the Northern Marianas out rather than join the Micronesians. So we're not in favor of the Congress of Micronesia. We want to be separate from the Congress of Micronesia and to have our own District Legislature here.

Willens: Well, you had your own District Legislature at the time, as did each of the other five districts. Why were you and the leaders here opposed to the creation of the Congress of Micronesia in which representatives from all six districts would meet?

Camacho: I think the main point is we are a minority and what we ask for we will never get. That's the simplest way to explain it.

Willens: So was it your sense that the Northern Marianas had a better chance of getting what it wanted from the TTPI High Commissioner than it would if there was a Congress of Micronesia in which the other districts were represented?

Camacho: Well, sometimes we'll say the TTPI government's not got enough money and now when the Congress of Micronesia was formed we are still thinking we won't get what we need because we are a minority within the Congress of Micronesia. Now look, for example, at the decisions after the creation of the Congress of Micronesia. Some good things, of course, happened there supporting Northern Marianas, but the major funds were

transmitted to Palau, to other districts for supporting their economy and things like that. Compared to what the Marianas getting and what Palau and Ponape's getting, it's way off. So we're still a minority, that's how we feel about it.

Willens: When did you first meet Bill Nabors?

Camacho: If I am not mistaken, I think he was at the TT government and I don't remember when, but somewhere around 1959, I guess.

Willens: I interviewed him recently on Tinian and he remembers that the leaders in the Northern Marianas were very upset with the creation of the Congress of Micronesia because they had not been consulted. He remembers being sent down from the Attorney General's office where he was assigned to meet with political leaders in the Northern Marianas and hear what their complaints were. Do you have any recollection of meeting with him on this subject?

Camacho: Yes, you know, I'm not sure.

Willens: What do you remember?

Camacho: Well, I remember that he was sent by the High Commissioner down to our municipal area to meet with the Municipal Legislature and the District Legislature and explain to us what the High Commissioner wanted. I know we opposed the Congress of Micronesia.

Willens: Was it your sense at the time that the Congress of Micronesia was going to be created whether you favored it or not?

Camacho: Yes.

Willens: Had it already been decided by the High Commissioner at the time you first heard about it?

Camacho: Yes, that's right. Whether we liked it or not, they'll still have a Congress of Micronesia, yes.

Willens: Did you and the other leaders in the Popular Party give any consideration as to what candidates should run for the first Congress of Micronesia?

Camacho: Okay. The Popular Party was strongly supporting Joe Cruz at that time because Cruz was in the Popular Party and late Senator Olympia T. Borja was in the Territorial Party. Manual D. Muna was also Popular Party and Juan A. Sablan was Territorial Party.

Willens: So, Juan A. Sablan was from the Territorial Party and I assume that Ben Manglona was Territorial Party?

Camacho: Territorial Party, yes, Rota.

Willens: After the Congress of Micronesia began to function, did you meet from time to time with the members of the Popular Party who were serving in the Congress of Micronesia?

Camacho: Yes, we met, not regularly, but occasionally when they have something that we should know and we have to decide what and how the delegates should present what we need.

Willens: So, would it be fair to say that there was sort of a group of leaders within the Popular Party who would meet regularly to discuss what was going on in the Congress of Micronesia, the District Legislature and the Municipal Council?

Camacho: They did once in a while present to the political parties, going Party to Party, I mean whoever had been elected from this Party had to go to his Party and report it. But on

events of general concern they would call a general meeting for the people of Saipan and Northern Marianas to discuss what the Congress of Micronesia wanted.

Willens: Is it your recollection that so far as the Congress of Micronesia was concerned, the Popular and the Territorial Party in the Northern Marianas worked together, for the most part.

Camacho: That's right.

Willens: Do you recall any particular issues that came before the Congress of Micronesia in the 1960's that were of concern to the Marianas?

Camacho: I don't know if I ever mentioned it to you. Danny Muna was involved at one time when there's a group of women and people who marched up to the High Commissioner's office because of the Congress of Micronesia and all those things. And I think either Danny or Manny Muna, I think its Danny Muna, who burns the TT flag in front of the High Commissioner's office. There's a lot of ladies and men there, but at that time I was involved with something else so I did not attend that motorcade. Maybe I planned to go up there and didn't.

Willens: The Future Status Commission [of the Congress of Micronesia] recommended a status of free association or, in the alternative, independence. The report was issued in 1969. Do you recall having any discussion with Dr. Palacios while he was serving as a member of that Future Status Commission?

Camacho: Yes, I recall that there were strong voices raised when Dr. Palacios reported to the people that the Congress of Micronesia had a plan for us to join with them to become a free association with the United States. But somehow the feel of the people of the Northern Marianas was completely different from what the Congress of Micronesia intended to do. So we again requested the delegates to the Congress of Micronesia to strongly oppose the proposal and let obtain our own commonwealth status.

Willens: Well, did you think that Dr. Palacios believed that he was representing the wishes of his constituents in the Northern Marianas when he favored that status?

Camacho: No, Dr. Palacios, in fact, himself encouraged us, rather than to go along with what the Congress of Micronesia intended, he mentioned about the commonwealth arrangement that perhaps we could get.

Willens: I don't understand that. He did join in with the recommendation that all of Micronesia stay together and seek a free association relationship.

Camacho: Yes, but when he reported to us at that time, there's a lot of voices against it. There really is no one agreeing to go along with the plan of the Congress of Micronesia. So our position at that time was just, no, no way for us to join with the Congress of Micronesia.

Willens: But at that time there were leaders in the Carolinian community who thought that Dr. Palacios' idea was a good one in the sense that it would keep all of Micronesia together. Is it your recollection that there was some different view among the Carolinian community?

Camacho: Not Dr. Palacios, because Dr. Palacios, although he's carrying his T. Palacios, Taman Palacios, he is no way with the Carolinian's way.

Willens: Well, how about Dr. Kaipat and Felix Rabauliman?

Camacho: Of course, Dr. Kaipat and Felix Rabauliman, they are 100 percent Carolinian so they think it might be okay to go with the Congress of Micronesia's plan. But we just cannot go along with it. So, finally, I think, Dr. Palacios, respected our opinions. Then, I think, all the members of the Congress of Micronesia, the Marianas delegates, they got together

- and made one [united] request that to let Northern Marianas leave the Congress of Micronesia, let us go on our way, our own way.
- Willens: Is it your recollection that Dr. Palacios did try to explain the report to you and a group of other political leaders after the Future Status Commission issued the report?
- Camacho: Yes. Well, he explained it to us but somehow even he is not agreed to it, but he had to report it because we voted him to represent us and he was doing pretty well.
- Willens: Was that at a public meeting or at meeting only of the political leaders?
- Camacho: There was a public meeting, but first they have to go with the political leaders, you know, like the Municipal Council and the District Legislature, and then to a general public.
- Willens: It was about the same time that Secretary of the Interior Hickel visited Micronesia. The visit took place in May of 1969. Do you have any recollection of Secretary Hickel visiting Saipan in May of 1969 and announcing that the United States was interested in exploring a future relationship with Micronesia?
- Camacho: Yes, I remember that.
- Willens: Well, what do you remember?
- Camacho: I remember when Secretary Hickel came here and encouraged us to go along with the recommendation of the Congress of Micronesia because the United States, and the United Nations, wanted to have this area as one Territory. But still it didn't convince us. We are still against it and we have to submit our request to the United Nations, to Hickel, and to the President of the United States.
- Willens: Did you attend any public meeting or ceremony at which Secretary Hickel spoke?
- Camacho: Yes.
- Willens: Do you remember whether it took place at the airport or elsewhere?
- Camacho: Oh, you got me. But I know I met him myself here.
- Willens: Well, what was your impression of Secretary Hickel?
- Camacho: Well, he understood. He told us that, of course, the United States would be happy to have the people of the Northern Marianas but the United Nations opposed that through the Trusteeship Agreement. I got the impression that he thought that it would be better to join with the other districts because it would be good for the United States, good for the United Nations. He doing what he's supposed to do, but we're still opposing him through resolution, through petitions, you know. In fact, our petitions went to the United Nations many, many, many times, even to the United States Congress, to the President of the United States.
- Willens: Do you think those resolutions made any difference?
- Camacho: Well, unfortunately at that time there were no responses coming saying "Okay, you can go your way." The United States took your wise study as to how to go about it and finally we came to the conclusion where we are today. And we are very happy and, of course, we thank the Lord that the United States accepted what our people of Northern Marianas wanted.
- Willens: There were a number of officials of the Department of the Interior who had responsibilities for the TTPI during the 1960's. Let me mention a few names and you tell me whether you had any personal dealings with them. Richard Taitano was from Guam and was appointed head of the Office of Territories at the beginning of the Kennedy Administration. He later

became Deputy High Commissioner out here. Did you have any personal dealings with Mr. Taitano?

Camacho: Periodically we met, visiting with him. The Northern Marianas people would invite Mr. Taitano to have a meeting with him.

Willens: What was your impression of Mr. Taitano?

Camacho: Well, Mr. Taitano, he's a Chamorro, too, from Guam, but he always protected himself, being naturalized. The truth is he knows that we'd be better off if we join with Guam or [are administered] separately by the Trust Territory government. But it's very hard for him to admit it, because he's part of the Administration.

Willens: Did you think he had much influence with the Administration?

Camacho: The way we look at it, I think not much came out from his mouth, but some education was accomplished by his reactions to our expressed desires to get away from the Trust Territory.

Willens: Well, one of his predecessors in that position was Jose Benitez of Puerto Rico.

Camacho: Yes.

Willens: Do you have any recollections of him?

Camacho: Yes. Pepe Benitez was very popular in Puerto Rico. In fact, we have been in Puerto Rico and visited him and talked about commonwealth status. Yes, when Mr. Benitez was here as acting High Commissioner, Deputy High Commissioner at one time, he's very much supporting our position. I would say the people of Northern Marianas were very happy to have Mr. Benitez because he had the feeling that we should get what we want. He was emphasizing to us that we will be better off if we decide to go with the United States. He's with the government, but he's on our side.

Willens: So, you thought he was more inclined to tell you what he personally thought was a good idea, rather than simply what he's being told by the High Commissioner?

Camacho: That's right. Although he would never come out by himself black and white, but you got some indication when you got him talking. We met quite a few times with him.

Willens: I've read somewhere that he was very popular because he went to the villages and joined in the feasts and the celebrations. Is that your recollection?

Camacho: Right.

Willens: Mr. Taitano was followed in the office of Territories by a woman by Ruth Van Cleve.

Camacho: Yes.

Willens: Did you have any dealings personally with Mrs. Van Cleve?

Camacho: Van Cleve? Well, only through resolutions and letters, but not personally.

Willens: During the early years of the Kennedy Administration there was an assistant secretary at Interior who worked for Mr. Udall named John Carver. Did you ever meet Assistant Secretary Carver who came out here from time to time?

Camacho: Yes. I think I met him once. Not on all the visits he made, but once I met him.

Willens: Do you have any recollection of that particular meeting?

Camacho: Well, it's almost the same, Howard, there's no person from the Interior Department who would come down and tell us what we wanted to hear.

- Willens: You don't remember anyone from Interior coming down and being very sympathetic to what you wanted to accomplish? Is that what you're saying?
- Camacho: Yes, when you see their reaction you would know that really, but to tell by his mouth, I think they were defending themselves.
- Willens: Well, then another assistant secretary later on in the Nixon Administration was Harrison Loesch. Do you have any recollection of meeting with Mr. Loesch?
- Camacho: No, I don't think so.
- Willens: There were many other issues that were of concern to some of the people of the Marianas beyond political status and Secretary Hickel, when he came here in 1969, addressed some of them. For example, he endorsed generally the policy of putting more Micronesians into positions of responsibility at the TTPI Headquarters. Did you have any feelings at the time as to whether this was an important issue?
- Camacho: Of course, that is an important issue because the Micronesian could fit into a position of an American.
- Willens: You thought it was important to get Micronesians trained to fill those positions?
- Camacho: Yes.
- Willens: Did you feel that the Trust Territory Administration was taking too much time in accomplishing that objective?
- Camacho: Too much time for the other Micronesians, but not enough time for the Marianas people. That's what I would say, yes.
- Willens: There also were complaints from time to time about the different pay levels in the TTPI Administration—that the stateside people would get paid substantially more than the Micronesians would be paid for doing the same job. Was the pay an issue, an important one?
- Camacho: Yes. I have heard there was also an issue that even when the persons who are Micronesian fit into the position of the statesider, they were not getting the same rate that [the statesider had] been getting, yes. This is happening.
- Willens: After Secretary Hickel came here, negotiations did begin between the United States and the Micronesians. The first session took place in late 1969 and Senator Palacios and Representative Manglona participated. Sometime in early 1970 the United States presented to the Micronesians what was called the Commonwealth Proposal. Do you have any recollection of a so-called Commonwealth Proposal being presented by the United States to the Micronesians?
- Camacho: Yes.
- Willens: You remember what the reaction was of the Micronesians?
- Camacho: Well, many of the Micronesians opposed it but some of the members of the Congress of Micronesia knew what we would achieve if we want to go into a commonwealth. They were not looking for a commonwealth, but some of the Micronesians, in fact, wished us good luck.
- Willens: The people in Guam in 1969 had voted in a referendum to reject reintegration. What was your reaction when you learned that the Guamanian voters had rejected reintegration?

- Camacho: Well, I think everybody has same feeling. You know, Howard, I was also involved in meeting with people on Guam, in the Guam Legislature and negotiating about one form of unification. At that time, they were supporting it.
- Willens: Who?
- Camacho: The Guam Legislature.
- Willens: Well, why did the referendum fail?
- Camacho: Okay, that's the problem. I found out later that Governor Guerrero, I think, his term's ending at that time. Every mission we made, jointly with the District Legislature and the Municipal Legislature, to go visiting with Guam. There's two or three occasions we met with Guam and discussed the wishes of the people of the Northern Marianas, the majority, because we have plebiscite here, the majority is joined with the platform of the Popular Party. The Territorial Party platform is to have free association with the United States. We, the leaders at that time, planned to visit Guam and seek opinions from the people of Guam and when we met with the Legislature there, they seemed to agree and welcome us to join with them.
- Willens: Was this before the referendum?
- Camacho: Yes, before the referendum. So what happened, after the referendum, we went back again to Guam. That's the time we found out how it happened. The political education committee was formed in Guam to go around to the villages and educate the people that this is the proposal for the reintegration to join with the Northern Marianas. And at the same time, Guam was seeking the first elected governor for Guam. But Governor Guerrero had indications that the political educational committee was not concentrating on the issue of the reintegration with Guam.
- Willens: With the Marianas.
- Camacho: Yes, they concentrated on the candidate for governor. So the support was weak on the plebiscite. But anyway, we the leaders at that time sensed that Guam didn't agree with our movement. That's the time we decided to change our goals. Instead of reintegration with Guam, and Dr. Palacios is the person who mentioned about the commonwealth arrangement. There's two ways of going to join with the United States. You failed on the reintegration with Guam so, of course, this is only other choice we have.
- Willens: So the only choice remaining was the one that the Territorial Party had identified itself with?
- Camacho: That's correct, yes.
- Willens: Well, after the referendum in 1969, did any of you think that pursuing reintegration with Guam was still a good idea and that with more political education in Guam it might have been accomplished?
- Camacho: No, our reaction on that was: "That's it, Guam doesn't like us, the heck with them." That's the reaction we had.
- Willens: Yes.
- Camacho: So we went on going, wisely creating a position, you know, for our delegates for the Marianas Political Status Commission.
- Willens: Well, one of the things that seems to have happened was the principal difference remaining, then, between the Popular Party on the one hand and the Territorial Party

- was that the Marianas wanted to have a status separate from the rest of the Trust Territory whereas the Territorial Party still seemed, to some extent, to think that all of Micronesia could stay together. Was that a difference that you saw at the time?
- Camacho: The majority of the Carolinians, I think, in fact, 90 percent of Carolinians were still going with the proposal to be one District [in a Micronesian state].
- Willens: Is that a position that the Territorial Party took because of the Carolinian community or were there other reasons why the leaders in the Territorial Party wanted to work something out with the other Districts?
- Camacho: That's what it was.
- Willens: Well, one thing I heard is that the Territorial Party did include some of the business leaders on Saipan. Is that correct?
- Camacho: Some, yes.
- Willens: Did the business leaders on Saipan in your opinion want to stay with the other Districts because they thought it would be better for them economically?
- Camacho: Well, some indications, yes. Some appeared to think that economically it was better if we stay with the Micronesians.
- Willens: What do you think their reasoning was?
- Camacho: I really don't know, but the way we were looking at it—perhaps they thinking about the competition—but we [were thinking about what] would bring assistance. Of course, there will be some more competition to come and maybe that's the reason the businessmen at that time, maybe they know that it will happen so they wanted to stay where they are at that time.
- Willens: As I understand it, the business leaders in Saipan were much more advanced commercially than business leaders in the other districts. Is that correct?
- Camacho: Well, I don't know if that is correct, because there are also some big businesses in Majuro and Ponape, even in Truk, even in Palau, so I don't think it's too different.
- Willens: What is your recollection when you first learned that the United States had agreed to separate status negotiations?
- Camacho: Well, we are all happy. Yes, we are all glad that now we can see all the hard work we have put in has come to reality and everybody is glad.
- Willens: Ed Pangelinan and Herman Q. Guerrero were members of what was called the Joint Committee on Future Political Status established by the Congress of Micronesia and they represented the Marianas on that committee. They attended negotiations with Ambassador Williams in late 1971 and then in April of 1972. Did you and other political leaders in the Marianas meet with Ed Pangelinan and Herman Q. Guerrero either before or after these status negotiations?
- Camacho: Oh, yes. Periodically we meet with them.
- Willens: Well, what do you recall about those meetings? Did they tell you what was going on? Did you give them instructions? What happened?
- Camacho: No. They explained everything that they know and then perhaps when some question and answer would come up from the other participants, they are the ones to respond to all the questions and, in fact, well everybody seems to be ready to swing and ready to go, don't want to wait. So everybody was happy, actually.

- Willens: The meetings were with leaders. Is that correct?
- Camacho: Yes.
- Willens: So it would include you and Ben Santos.
- Camacho: Yes.
- Willens: Who else would typically be present from the Popular Party to discuss these issues with Ed Pangelinan and Herman Guerrero?
- Camacho: Well, there's quite a number of people there involving leaders of the parties, you know. There's a several people; it's not only a few of us.
- Willens: What other names come to mind, I mean like, would Danny Muna be there?
- Camacho: Oh, Danny Muna, Mitch Pangelinan, and Manny Muna, and..
- Willens: Felipe Salas?
- Camacho: Felipe Salas, and there's a lot of others even, of course, Joe Cruz. Sometime we went to Tinian to convince the Tinian people. Eddie and Herman, they want to report to them but sometimes we joined going with them, encouraging the people of Tinian. The Ladies Association and lot of people attend those meetings every time Eddie and Herman went to Tinian.
- Willens: There was some concern that the United States might turn down the Marianas in its request for separate negotiations because the United States had always taken the position that it should deal with only with all of the six Districts as a unit.
- Camacho: You know, we feel at that time there's no way for the United States to turn down our request, because look into the history of the legislative bodies beginning from the Saipan Legislature, District Legislature, the Congress of Micronesia and all the way. The top priority position held by the people of the Northern Marianas is to become part of the United States. So, there's no way the United States will turn it down. And also I think they will be sympathetic in the United Nations, you know when people are continually requesting it, I have the impression they might say, well, this is what they want, give it to them.
- Willens: After the United States agreed to separate negotiations in April of 1972, Ambassador Williams visited Saipan and met with some of the political leaders. Do you have any recollection of meeting him at that time?
- Camacho: Yes.
- Willens: What do you remember?
- Camacho: Yes, Howard. I don't really remember what day it was, but after Eddie and Herman reported to us that the United States accepted our request—I don't remember when that was—but one time the Ambassador was visiting in the islands. I don't even remember when and how and where we had the first meeting with Ambassador Williams.
- Willens: Did you on behalf on the Saipan Municipal Council make any formal presentation in support of the separate negotiations?
- Camacho: Yes, we all had a similar intention, the District Legislature and Saipan Legislature and other party organizations. Yes, everybody is supporting the intention of the Political Status Commission's movement.
- Willens: Do you have any recollection of your first impression of Ambassador Williams?

- Camacho: Well, as I recall Ambassador Williams mentioned that he came here to see whether the people of Northern Marianas really were serious on our political goals.
- Willens: Can you tell me whether you participated in any of the discussions in creating the Marianas Political Status Commission?
- Camacho: Yes. Herman and Eddie requested to create the Marianas Political Status Commission with some representation from the District Legislature, some from the Saipan Legislature, some at that time serving at the Congress of Micronesia, and some from the other [interests], like business.
- Willens: Did you and the other leaders in the Popular Party discuss the creation of such a group and who should be on it?
- Camacho: Yes, we had a meeting on it.
- Willens: Were there any differences of view among you as to what should be done?
- Camacho: I don't remember who was the leader at that time.
- Willens: Well, Ben Santos was still President of the District Legislature.
- Camacho: Yes, that's right. I think that came up from the District Legislature's request that they should create the Political Status Commission. That's right, Howard. With some members from the private sector, some from the Carolinians, some from the Popular Party, some from the Territorial Party, and some from the Municipal Council. And that's how they selected the Marianas Political Status Commission. So, I personally happened to be selected by the Municipal Council to represent the Council.
- Willens: Did you want to be a member?
- Camacho: I did. Yes, I wanted to become a member.
- Willens: And who was the other representative who came out from the Municipal Council? That might have been Mitch?
- Camacho: No, I think Mitch represented the political party.
- Willens: I think that's right.
- Camacho: I represent the Municipal Legislature and I think Mitch represent the Popular Party. Danny Muna represented the Municipal Legislature.
- Willens: Felipe Salas was also on it.
- Camacho: District Legislature, yes.
- Willens: So, was Mr. Muna in the District Legislature or on the Saipan Legislature?
- Camacho: Danny Muna was Saipan Municipal Council.
- Willens: What is your recollection about the first meetings of the Marianas Political Status Commission where you organized yourself and elected your Chairman and Vice-Chairman? Do you remember those meetings?
- Camacho: Yes. Chairman for the Political Status Commission? I remember that Eddie Pangelinan has been selected to chair the Political Status Commission because of the fact that he is highly educated as a lawyer. I think he was serving in the Congress of Micronesia. That's why we selected him as a leader at that time.
- Willens: But he was relatively young compared with the rest of you or many of you, isn't that correct?

- Camacho: Oh, yes I know, I understand that. But I think even though he is young and not too deeply involved with the movement of the Northern Marianas, somehow he has Ben Santos along with him and others. He may not know everything, but he can learn. What we need is the right person to lead on the legal matters and what not. That's why we selected Eddie Pangelinan to be Chairman.
- Willens: And why was Ben Santos selected as Vice-Chairman?
- Camacho: Well, he was selected as Vice-Chairman because he was the President of the District Legislature and also he is one of the really strong leaders in the movement to a political union with the United States.
- Willens: Do you recall any discussion about the hiring of consultants, legal consultants or economic consultants?
- Camacho: Yes, from time to time we held a meeting to consider what we needed to form this kind of organizations. And that's why we were depending on Eddie, because Eddie is well aware about the area of Washington, D.C. and, as it ended up, he found you and everybody who's been serving as a consultant on the Marianas Political Status Commissions.
- Willens: Do you recall any discussion about whether a lawyer from the United States should be hired or whether a lawyer from someplace else should be hired?
- Camacho: Oh, yes. We discussed that and we agreed completely because Eddie presented your name and Leonard.
- Willens: Do you recall Jim White was selected a executive director?
- Camacho: Yes.
- Willens: Did you know Mr. White?
- Camacho: Yes, I know him.
- Willens: And Mr. Screen at one point was designated to be a consultant to the Commission. He worked at the time for Joeten.
- Camacho: Yes.
- Willens: Did you support his being hired?
- Camacho: I don't think I did. I didn't support him.
- Willens: You did not.
- Camacho: I did not support Joe Screen. The fact, he's a smart fellow but somehow he's with the TT government at that time and the people on Saipan and TT officials had kind of a bad relationship because we were always against the TT and Joe Screen somehow was one of the High Commissioner staff.
- Willens: As you may remember, the first round of negotiations was more or less a ceremonial round that opened with an invocation and speeches at Mt. Carmel Auditorium. Then we moved to the Royal Taga for a working session to which the public was invited, and then the second day was meetings between the two delegations on some procedural issues. Do you have any general recollections of your feelings at the time of the opening ceremony when there was a considerable crowd attracted and speeches were given by Chairman Pangelinan and Ambassador Williams?
- Camacho: Yes, Howard, I think I can say it this way. My impression is that [this represented] the wishes of the majority of people of the Northern Marianas to seek a ways and means for us

to become a part of the United States, a permanent political arrangement with the United States. And my impression was that as a member of the Political Status Commission I believed every one of them will share my feeling and the general public is concerned that our goal, our plan is to get this done.

Willens: Did you have any general impression about Ambassador Williams and the U.S. Delegation when you first met them?

Camacho: Yes, Howard, let me put it this way. First, when we met with Ambassador Williams and the other team members. Ambassador Williams himself is a pretty understanding kind of person. He knows how to approach and explain to the people the negotiations. And he also explained to us that he was sent by the President of the United States as his personal representative for this negotiation. We thought at that time, even now, that we were lucky to have Ambassador Williams as a personal representative of the President at the political status negotiations.

Willens: Did you think that the negotiations were going to be over in a relatively short time?

Camacho: I never thought it would take us over a year. We on the Commission worked periodically between the negotiating meetings, if I'm not mistaken, maybe about four or five times meeting [among] ourselves to go over the negotiations.

Willens: Did you think it was going to be relatively easy to accomplish the objective that you had?

Camacho: We anticipated difficulty because we here in the tropical islands wanted pretty much to have a match-up with [the standard of living of] the people in the United States.

Willens: What kind of a match-up did you think?

Camacho: The standard of living here and standard of living there, and the government system here and the government system there, and things like that.

Willens: So, you thought it might be difficult reaching agreement because of the differences between the two groups?

Camacho: At first, that's how I thought about that. I thought that it was going to be difficult but when we are in the meetings I feel like it's not so hard.

Willens: As the negotiations began, what do you remember, if anything, about your understanding of what commonwealth meant and what kind of political institutions you thought the Marianas should have? What was important to you?

Camacho: Well, in the past we have government from whomever will come, like Japan, Germany, the Spanish. We were fed up with those kinds of systems, so we selected the United States for us to become part of United States. Now when we were negotiating as the Marianas Political Status Commission, we thought about the type of arrangement that Puerto Rico has and we did some study of that.

Willens: One issue that came up at the end of the first round of negotiations centered on the word "permanent." The proposed joint communiqué, which was to be issued by the two sides at the end of that round of the negotiations, said that the Marianas were striving toward a permanent relationship with the United States. And Dr. Palacios took issue with the use of the word "permanent." He thought that the children and grandchildren of the Northern Marianas citizens should be able to make up their own mind in the future as to what kind of political relationship they wanted to have. Do you remember any differences with Dr. Palacios over the use of the word "permanent?"

- Camacho: I don't think so.
- Willens: Did you personally have any problem with using the word "permanent" to describe the kind of relationship with the United States that you wanted?
- Camacho: Well, personally, no, that doesn't affect me at all because if you want to part of the United States, it can be "permanently" with the United States. I'm fine with that. Other people want later on, if the wishes of the people change, to becoming independent, I don't have any feeling about us becoming independent at all, so I stick to my position to stay with the United States permanently.
- Willens: The next round of the negotiations was in May of 1973. And during the recess between the first and the second round, the economic consultant, Mr. Leonard, and my law firm conducted studies and produced reports. What was your general assessment of Mr. Leonard and his performance as economic consultant? Were you able to understand his reports?
- Camacho: Yes, not 100 percent but I think about 70 to 80 percent I understand. Mr. Leonard was studying the past economy of the Northern Marianas and the future.
- Willens: Did you find it useful to have an economic consultant that could help you and the other members of the Commission think ahead to what your financial needs would be in the future?
- Camacho: Yes.
- Willens: In light of what's developed in the last more than 20 years since you first were appointed to the Marianas Political Status Commission, do you think the economic growth that's taken place here was something you had any idea would occur when you first began negotiations with the United States?
- Camacho: Well, economic growth went on smoothly until five years ago, then the economy is pretty bad here. But everything was fine as far as my concerns, there's nothing bad for it.
- Willens: One of the big issues at the second round of negotiations related to the U.S. proposal to acquire the entire island of Tinian and lease back one-third of the island to the civilian community. The proposal was apparently leaked to the *Pacific Daily News* and at the very beginning of the negotiations there was a big front page story in the newspaper about this request by the United States. Did you have any reaction that you can remember now about this proposal that the United States acquire the entire island of Tinian?
- Camacho: I think at first the United States wanted to get all of Tinian but we renegotiated that. The Marianas Political Status Commission did not agree with the proposal of the U.S. Delegation so we come up to a compromise of the one-third of Tinian for the Northern Marianas' use.
- Willens: Did you think that the original U.S. proposal was asking for too much?
- Camacho: Personally since we agreed with it, I don't feel like it's too much.
- Willens: You mean you don't feel that the end result, making two-thirds of the island available, was too much? You agreed to that as a member of the Commission?
- Camacho: That's right.
- Willens: Do you remember going over to Tinian to attend any public meeting with the public on Tinian along with other members of the Commission and Ambassador Williams to discuss the U.S. proposal?

- Camacho: Yes, I remember. In fact, the first day that we arrived at the airport a small group of Tinian [citizens] was gathering at the airport waiting for us. And this small group was really against the proposal of Ambassador Williams and even the compromise proposal we have also. They were against it, so they showed up at the airport and they wanted us to go back to Saipan and they don't need us. In fact, some people showed up with guns and machetes to try to scare us. But we didn't look for any trouble there. We just came to educate these people. They did not really mean to do that [cause trouble]; but they did try to raise a voice that we should leave them alone, not touching the island, you know?
- Willens: Do you think that most people on Tinian were prepared to make two-thirds of their island available for U.S. military requirements?
- Camacho: Not all, but I think the majority of Tinian agrees with the two-thirds arrangement.
- Willens: Well, one of the issues that came up throughout the negotiations was whether the Marianas Political Status Commission, which had two members from Tinian on it, was representing the people of Tinian or whether the question of making land available ought to be left entirely to the people on Tinian. There was this idea on Tinian that they alone should decide whether or not to make the land available and that the Marianas Political Status Commission should not assume that responsibility. Did you have any sense at the time that the Commission was doing its best to represent the people of Tinian?
- Camacho: I do believe that, because even the two people who represented Tinian at that time also strongly wanted to stick with our position. And they're the ones who really influenced some of the people of Tinian to go along with the MPSC's proposal and, of course, there's campaigning and political education and finally more people come to understand the proposal and they agreed.
- Willens: The United States originally proposed that the entire village of San Jose would be moved to another part of the island and new houses with modern facilities would be built for the residents of that new village.
- Camacho: Yes.
- Willens: They subsequently modified the proposal so that there was no relocation of the village of San Jose. Do you have any recollection of whether you thought relocation of the village was a good idea?
- Camacho: Well, to myself and also to every one of the Political Status Commission it was the best idea, so we tried to make the people of Tinian understand and to convince them that the United States would offer each family in Tinian the relocation of the San Jose village to the upper part of the hill on Tinian. I think that area is excellent for a village. Because the United States planned joint use of the harbor, military and civilian, we planned to convince the Tinian people that they should be moving up to the new location, but a lot of people disagreed with it. So, in fact, we held a meeting with them and we presented the slides that Ambassador Williams provided for us to show to the Tinian people. In those slides each family of Tinian, even if they don't have a real decent house that they are presently living in at that time, they are entitled to be given one complete, concrete solid [house] with utilities, a complete house. This is a modern house that has two, three, four bedrooms plus the streets, roads, garage, and everything. Some people, they think that's not true.
- Willens: They think it's not true?
- Camacho: Yes, some people who are against the two-thirds arrangement, they tell people on Tinian that that's not true, that [the relocated village] will never come up, I think we better stay

here in San Jose village. Well, the reason why we tried to convince them to move out from there was because the military, if it needs to load ammunition there could be a danger to the people who stayed in near the harbor, and that's why for safety reasons and for betterment we thought they should relocate the village. But the majority of Tinian people were against that because they think it is not true and they disagree. They rather have Tinian, the whole, for them rather than for us to negotiate for them, you know, and so we tried hard for them to understand; we showed them the slide show, picture by picture and step by step. Some people agree but not all of them. In fact, the people who don't agree (I think) still have a lack of understanding what the political status means to the United States negotiating team. We tried to educate them in both Chamorro and English, you know, but still some people just don't want to understand, because they'd rather we leave them alone. That's why the relocation of the San Jose village didn't go through. Later on, I think after one month, there's a petition coming from Tinian asking the Ambassador Williams and Marianas Political Status Commission to accept the relocation of the San Jose village because later on they regret that they didn't get that opportunity. Even the church and school, there was proposed that the Tinian people will be built a new church, a school, plus the houses—and these are concrete houses, improved—and sewer line and facilities and utilities. On the first day there was a lot of propaganda that the people didn't understand clearly. So after they don't want to relocate the San Jose village, we accepted that and so the petition came up about a month later. By then, it was almost the time for us to sign the agreement. So, you know, to go back again for that purpose I think hurts our timing of signing the Covenant.

Willens: Staying with the military land issue for the moment. Did you think at the time of the negotiations that the United States was telling the Northern Marianas people that it definitely intended to build the base on Tinian within the next several years if the Marianas agreed to make the land available? Did you expect that a base would be built in the near future?

Camacho: Oh yes, sure. At that time the military was still in the Pacific area, like Philippines and Okinawa, and the future proposal was to utilize Tinian also. We understand that and we expected the United States to build the base there in Tinian. I still remember when Ambassador Williams was mentioning to them, the commissary store or anything that the military is providing as service to the military personnel, the Tinian people would be allowed also to go into that commissary store or PX, whatever, and any other activities that the military could help, I think they were willing to do. But still the Tinian people hadn't gotten a clear picture, because I think some people had already negotiated with Okinawa and the Japanese to build up a golf course and all that. I think that this one small group was trying to convince them not to agree with the U.S. proposal and to support the future plan of golf and hotels and everything to develop Tinian.

Willens: The United States Delegation also told the Commission and the Tinian people that construction of a base and operation of a base would provide employment opportunities for the people on Tinian and have economic benefits to the Northern Marianas as a whole. Did you believe at the time that construction and operation of a base would generate revenue for the future Marianas Government?

Camacho: Oh yes, in fact, I have the impression from the people of Saipan that they know that the United States can provide the ferry back and forth from Saipan to Tinian and people on Saipan mentioned at that time that it would be better for them if they cannot find a job here on this island, maybe they can go down to Tinian and apply for job on Tinian. If that is possible for us, it would help the economy on both islands. I mean, even people of Rota

who want to come to work for the military in Tinian, they can do so.

- Willens: Okay. Just one other question about the military issue. The United States from the very beginning said it wanted to purchase the land. And the Marianas Political Status Commission always said that it would not agree to purchase but it would be prepared to recommend a lease of the land. Was the difference between purchase and lease of the land important to you?
- Camacho: I think the people of the Northern Marianas felt like it is better to lease, because that money's guaranteed month by month, you know, the rental, and it will be increased every 10 or 20 years or something like that. So that's why we want to stick to a lease instead of selling it.
- Willens: As it worked out, the United States has not developed the land in the last twenty years and recently some land has been leased back to the Northern Marianas government for use by the people. What is your feeling today about the fact that the United States has leased this land on Tinian but has never used it for military purposes? Do you still think it was a good idea for the Commission to agree to lease the land?
- Camacho: Well, I'm not clear on that question, Howard.
- Willens: The Covenant did provide that the Northern Marianas would be able to have its own constitution and establish its own agencies of government. Was that guarantee important to you?
- Camacho: Yes.
- Willens: Why?
- Camacho: That it is important to have a constitution? I guess everybody is aware that is the foundation for our government arrangement.
- Willens: Were you generally satisfied with the amount of money that the Covenant ultimately provided for the Commonwealth?
- Camacho: Yes.
- Willens: Do you think it's proved to be adequate financial support over the years?
- Camacho: As far as my concerns, yes.
- Willens: In November 1974 there was an election for the Congress of Micronesia. As a result of the election Ed Pangelinan, who was Chairman of the Commission, and Herman Q. Guerrero, who was a member of the Commission, were defeated by members of the Territorial Party, specifically, Oscar Rasa and Pete A. Tenorio. And this created some doubt as to whether the Marianas Political Status Commission was going to be able to complete its work. Many people have told me that political status was a big issue in that election and that Ed Pangelinan and Herman Guerrero got beat because it was believed that the Popular Party leadership was progressing too rapidly toward this relationship with the United States. Do you have any recollection of that election and why it was that the Popular Party candidates were defeated?
- Camacho: Well, I really don't have too much concern about that. I know Ambassador Williams and his group were really nervous, but my feeling was that the other members of the Political Status Commission were not too concerned about who will be leading the group. I know that even the Territorial Party at that time and the Popular Party, a lot of people mentioned we should agree to that proposal of commonwealth of the Northern Marianas. So, regardless whether the leader of the party will take a seat or not we still have the feeling

that the people, even the Territorial people, agreed and wanted to support the wishes of the majority of the people of the Northern Marianas to become part of the United States. So, I didn't feel like we were in a bad position in regards to completing the negotiations.

Willens: Did you think that Pete A. Tenorio and Oscar Rasa who became members of the Commission were going to support the work of the Commission and approve what had been done, or did you think they might want to take a different approach?

Camacho: No, Pete A. Tenorio mentioned even before he intended to run for the Congress that he's supporting the movement. Except Oscar Rasa; I think he completely disagreed with the Covenant.

Willens: Why do you think Oscar Rasa disagreed with the Covenant?

Camacho: I don't know really to tell you the reasons. Mr. Rasa was raised out of Saipan, you know, he was raised up in Ponape and, I think, maybe he's got the feeling of rather becoming a Ponapeian than a Saipanese. I don't know, maybe that's it.

Willens: I've seen somewhere the suggestion that you volunteered to step off the Commission to make your seat available to Mr. Pangelinan. Do you have any recollection of making that offer?

Camacho: Yes, I forgot all about that. But really I did that, you know. I think it is necessary in order for Ed to stay as Chairman of the Political Status Commission. There's pressure from the general public and particularly Popular Party, if the Territorial Party is seated in the Congress of Micronesia maybe they would destroy the negotiations. But the only person that I'm afraid of was Oscar Rasa; he's completely against this movement. Some people would question if the members of the Congress of Micronesia, the Northern Marianas delegates from the Territorial Party, automatically become Political Status Commission members. Looking at the Territorial Party and Popular Party, I don't really remember how many Popular Party and how many Territorial Party [COM members there were] at that time. But I really told the Popular Party members at that time that we rather have Eddie Pangelinan to maintain his chairmanship on the Political Status Commission, although he's out of the Congress of Micronesia. So I offer my seat to Eddie Pangelinan and, somehow, I don't know how it happened, later on, I can't remember, I don't know how it happened, but anyway Eddie was continued on his chairmanship and I also continued all the way up to the end. I can't remember what happened between Senator Borja and Ed Pangelinan.

Willens: Okay. The last round of negotiations was split into two sessions. There was a session in December of 1974 and then there was a short recess before the final session in February of 1975, when the Covenant was actually signed. At the time that the Commission reconvened in February of 1975 the delegates on the Commission from Rota and Tinian requested for the first time that the Covenant make arrangements for a bicameral legislature in which Rota and Tinian would be equally represented with Saipan in the upper house or the Senate. And the Commission met for several days to discuss this request. Do you have any recollection of the request made by Rota and Tinian late in the negotiations for a bicameral legislature?

Camacho: Yes. At that time the majority in Rota and Tinian was against the Covenant. I think we agreed to their request because our most important goal is to convince them to sign the Covenant.

Willens: Do you think they would have agreed to sign the Covenant if the Commission had not agreed to their request?

- Camacho: See, the question is we don't know. The question is we don't know whether we would be defeated or not, so we're afraid of that thing happening, so we gave them a compromise.
- Willens: Now how do you think that has worked out over the past 17 years or so?
- Camacho: Well, to tell you the truth, really it didn't work out very well.
- Willens: Do you think that the equal representation in the Senate has given Rota and Tinian too much power within the Commonwealth?
- Camacho: Yes, since the beginning, too much power.
- Willens: Two members of the Commission did not sign the Covenant or appear at the signing ceremony. One was Oscar Rasa and one was Felix Rabauliman. Do you know why Mr. Rabauliman decided not to sign the Covenant?
- Camacho: No, the truth is I don't know really. Maybe because they are Carolinians. Oscar Rasa is also part Carolinian from Ponape. But I don't know really what's the reason.
- Willens: Did you believe that the Carolinian leadership was generally opposed to the Covenant or did they support the same objectives that you and other Chamorro leaders had?
- Camacho: I think the majority of Carolinians opposed the Covenant.
- Willens: Why?
- Camacho: Well, they preferred to stay with the other Micronesians as proposed by the Congress of Micronesia. I think some of the Carolinians think it's the best for them because they are Carolinians. And us, we're not even part of Carolinians, and we have been wishing to get away from the Carolinians to allow us to promote our future as Chamorros.
- Willens: Did you participate in the political education program with respect to the Covenant before the plebiscite?
- Camacho: Yes.
- Willens: Well, what did you do?
- Camacho: Well, we went around and had meetings, on Tinian and Rota, here in Saipan. And we tell people, we explain item by item in our proposal.
- Willens: You think there was enough time between the signing of the Covenant and the plebiscite for the people in the Northern Marianas to understand fully what they were being asked to vote on?
- Camacho: I would say yes.
- Willens: Were you surprised at the fact that 78 percent of the people approved the Covenant?
- Camacho: Well, no, I never was surprised because I know that even in the Territorial Party, there's a lot of them, you know, discussing in private gatherings or some parties, and even in the political education meetings, and raising a lot of questions, but when the questions are answered then they came to agree. So, I'm not surprised at the overwhelming majority for the plebiscite. Because, although even the Territorial Party's majority can say that they prefer to become united with the Carolinians, that is not really the true feeling of the people in the Northern Marianas. Although the leaders are against it, the members really do not have the same feeling. They share with us. So really it doesn't surprise me.
- Willens: Who do you remember as being the most outspoken opponents of the Covenant?

- Camacho: If I'm not mistake Oscar Rasa was one, and at that time Congressman [Jose] Mafnas, Jesus Mafnas, and Felix Rabauliman, and several others.
- Willens: Several others?
- Camacho: Territorial Party members, you know.
- Willens: Did leaders in the business community like Joeten or Mr. Villagomez take positions one way or another?
- Camacho: In one way Mr. Tenorio agreed, but in the other way he disagreed, but I don't know which part is agreeable to him and which part is disagreeable to him. I'm not too sure whether he's supporting the Covenant or not because that's a secret ballot, you know.
- Willens: That's certainly right. After the Covenant was approved here in the Northern Marianas it was submitted to the United States Congress for review and approval. Did you make any visits to Washington as part of a delegation to lobby for the Covenant in the U.S. Congress?
- Camacho: At one time, yes. We gathered with the District Legislature.
- Willens: You went with some leaders from the District Legislature to Washington?
- Camacho: Yes.
- Willens: Do you remember who you met with in Washington?
- Camacho: We met with Philip Burton.
- Willens: Did you meet with anyone in the Senate or either members of the Senate or their staff?
- Camacho: I forgot their names, yes, we met with them. In fact, at that time there's a big issue came up with—is it Senator Hart or Congressman Hart?
- Willens: He was a Senator at the time.
- Camacho: Gary Hart. Senator Hart.
- Willens: What was the issue he raised if you remember?
- Camacho: I don't really remember everything, but I know for sure he's against the Commonwealth arrangement and I think he's supporting the intentions of the Congress of Micronesia for the whole of Micronesia. But not the Covenant, not the Commonwealth. I remember one time when we were heading for Congressman Burton's office or some other Senator's office and we met Senator Gary Hart in the hallway approaching the elevator. I think someone among the group—I don't know who did it—they said that he is Senator Gary Hart. So, you know, we waved at him and said, "Hi". He doesn't even bother looking at us. I think he knows we are from the Northern Marianas, but he never bothered to pay attention or courtesy to us, you know, he just turned around, turned his back, and went to the elevator.
- Willens: Was there any worry on your part that the Senate might not approve the Covenant?
- Camacho: Yes, of course, because I know that the Senate of the United States is very important. We don't know for sure at that time who's supporting the Covenant. That's why we went there to lobby the U.S. Congress. So we made courtesy calls and visited a few members.
- Willens: Do you think those visits were useful?
- Camacho: Very useful, yes.
- Willens: What makes you think so?

- Camacho: Well, they usually gave us a signal or said they would support the Covenant.
- Willens: Yes.
- Camacho: So I have the confidence for them to support the Covenant.
- Willens: Did you meet with any members of Ambassador Williams' staff when you were in Washington?
- Camacho: Yes. I don't remember every name. I've forgotten.
- Willens: Do you remember any names?
- Camacho: Mr. Wilson. There's a Senator and Congressman from Hawaii also that we approached. If I'm not mistaken, Congresswoman Patsy Mink and Senator Fong from Hawaii and Congressman, is it Matsunaga, or something? We pay a courtesy call also to their office and they assure us that they would support us. So we have the confidence also of support from the Congressmen and Senator from Hawaii in terms of the Covenant.
- Willens: After the Covenant was approved by the United States Congress and signed by President Ford in March 1976, discussion began here in the Northern Marianas about organizing the First Constitutional Convention. Did you play any role or take any action in connection with the 1st Constitutional Convention?
- Camacho: I don't have a recollection of that, Howard.
- Willens: You told me earlier in the interview that it was about this time in 1976 or 1977 when you were a candidate for mayor of the island of Saipan. Am I recalling correctly?
- Camacho: Yes.
- Willens: Do you remember what specific year that was?
- Camacho: Well, it was in 1976.
- Willens: Before the Commonwealth government got underway? Just to refresh your recollection, the first Commonwealth election was in November of 1977. That's when Carlos Camacho ran against Joeten to be Governor. Is it your recollection that the Mayor's position on Saipan became vacant a year earlier than that.
- Camacho: 1976.
- Willens: And as a result of that political campaign I gather you switched your party affiliation at that time?
- Camacho: They considered me as an independent candidate, but really I don't fit into that category because I am a solid and strong Popular Party member. If I'm not mistaken, I think I had over 500 voters who urged me to campaign for the mayorship. They're the ones who really want me to become mayor, but there are a lot of diehard Popular Party—you know like the Ladies Association and other old peoples relying on the ladies association—so they went around house-to-house, door-to-door campaigning. They were supporting Mitch instead of me.
- Willens: Well they were supporting Mitch Pangelinan rather than you.
- Camacho: Rather than me.
- Willens: As I recall, neither of you got elected.
- Camacho: Neither one because the Territorial Party members solidly voted for one candidate.
- Willens: And who was that candidate again?

- Camacho: Luis M. Benavente.
- Willens: Benavente.
- Camacho: Yes.
- Willens: Did you have any governmental assignments under the Commonwealth's government since January of 1978? Have you served in the Government in any capacity since then?
- Camacho: No, I only remain as a member of the board of directors of the Marianas Visitors Bureau (MVB). I was member of that. Prior to that there's a Tourist Commission during the TT time. They had a board of directors. And I was appointed by the District Administrator to fill a vacancy of someone who wasn't there. And I became a member of the Marianas Visitors Bureau in 1979. The first elected Governor, Carlos Camacho, didn't touch the positions much in the MVB because he knows I'm capable and qualified to be a good member of the Marianas Visitors Bureau due to the fact I speak fluent and write Japanese and it's very useful for the other board members who don't know how to speak Japanese, especially when you go out to Japan to having a conference or seminar. In fact, that's what we have been doing in the past; we conducted city seminars, trade shows, and conferences to promote tourism here in the Northern Marianas.
- Willens: Are you generally pleased with the way the tourist industry has developed here in the Northern Marianas?
- Camacho: Indeed, in fact, let me just freshen up my memory on that. When I was on the Municipal Council as Speaker for, if I'm not mistaken, over six years in that capacity, the Municipal Code mentions that in the absence of the Mayor, the Speaker of the Municipal Council become an acting mayor. So, every time the Mayor is off-island I am the acting mayor so I have the interest of promoting the tourism here in the island. As a member of the Municipal Council, I could alter the resolutions promoting certain areas in Saipan as tourist sites. So I still have the feeling to promote the tourisms here in the island. Every time I was acting mayor, I assigned some group to start working on the tourist site areas, you know, to clear out the roads and pathway.
- Willens: The what?
- Camacho: The pathway to the cliff, you know, like for instance where Bonsai Cliff is today, and Suicide Cliff. Suicide Cliff at that time wasn't so bad as a tourist spot, but Bonsai Cliff really at that time didn't have any guard rail for preventing someone from falling down, so I assigned some people to do that from the Municipal government. I assigned the Public Works team to erect the guard rail as well as on the other side of the island, the view of the Bird Island. That also is pretty rough and it's not passable for the people. But now if you go there it's very neat, and I developed that, too.
- Willens: How do you feel about the number of alien laborers in Saipan who have come to work in the hotels in the construction business and in other enterprises here? Is that a problem in your mind?
- Camacho: I have the feeling that perhaps we can utilize the people here and convince and educate our people how to fill in the vacancies or the positions of the alien workers here. But the people of the Marianas, I don't know really why they don't want to work in hotels or in the other places where they have a lot of alien people there. I think most of our people are willing to work in the government only. But there are few people willing to work even in supervisory capacities in the private sector.

Willens: As we bring this interview to conclusion, Ben, is there anything else that you'd like to say for the record about the work of the Marianas Political Status Commission or the Commonwealth as it exists today?

Camacho: Personally, I would like to say this—that I am very happy that Eddie Pangelinan chose you and Mr. Leonard, and the other Howard? Can you tell me who was the other Howard, because I don't remember.

Willens: Howard Mantel, you mean?

Camacho: Yes. I am very pleased that Eddie Pangelinan selected you and Howard and Jim White to work for us. I would like to personally express to you that you did such a good thing, your team and it helps a lot. And we're glad. Without you and the other consultants I know for sure that we wouldn't ever come to conclusion on our Covenant. And now you try to put everything into a book. That's good.

Willens: Well, thank you, Ben, that's very kind of you. Thank you very much for your help.