

## INTERVIEW OF JAMES M. MENDIOLA

by Howard P. Willens and Deanne C. Siemer

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- Willens: James M. Mendiola is a former mayor of Tinian and a current delegate to the Third Constitution Convention. Mr. Mendiola's father also served as mayor of Tinian. Mr. Mendiola has kindly agreed to be interviewed as part of our political history of the Northern Mariana Islands. Mr. Mendiola, thank you very much for taking the time to be available. Could you begin by giving us some background about your family and your early education?
- Mendiola: Thank you, Mr. Willens. This is the first time someone came over here and tried to get some history straightened up, instead of picking up from the air what had happened. My father is Felipe Mendiola. He's the former mayor of Tinian. He was mayor for 12 years.
- Willens: What years were those?
- Mendiola: Since 1972, I believe, from there on. He was the first mayor of Tinian under constitutional government here. And then after 1979, I was elected to the House of Representatives for the CNMI.
- Willens: Was that in the First Legislature of the new Commonwealth.
- Mendiola: Second Legislature.
- Willens: You were elected in 1979 and began service in 1980?
- Mendiola: That's correct.
- Willens: You mentioned before we went on the record that you were one of 14 children. Was that correct?
- Mendiola: Yes, I'm the oldest son of Felipe.
- Willens: When were you born?
- Mendiola: I was born April 24, 1949.
- Willens: Were you born on the island of Tinian?
- Mendiola: That's always the question that comes up. I was born in Guam.
- Willens: So you were a U.S. citizen from birth?
- Mendiola: Yes.
- Willens: Has that proved to be an advantage or a disadvantage in your political career?
- Mendiola: During my political career it's been very hard to explain this to some people. The disadvantage is that I was never given a homestead, because during the Trust Territory no U.S. citizen could get land. Then I bought some land during that time and, when the constitutional government began, I already had the land and so they would not give me any more. So I did not get any freebie on these land deals that have been going on.
- Willens: Were your parents residents of Guam at the time of your birth or was it simply by accident that you were born on Guam?

- Mendiola: No, I think that after the war my dad stayed in Rota and then after that, because of the hardship on the family, I believe he went to Guam to work as an alien worker there. Then he brought in my mom and we ended up having two U.S. citizens in the family.
- Willens: Both you and one of your siblings?
- Mendiola: One of my brothers.
- Willens: Were your mother and father born on Rota?
- Mendiola: Yes.
- Willens: Do you have any recollection of family history, specifically how they came to Rota, and when they might have come to Rota?
- Mendiola: No, I am not sure what had happened back then. I think they had been in Rota from the beginning of time. My grandmother came from Guam.
- Willens: I see. Do you recall the circumstances under which your parents moved to Tinian?
- Mendiola: Yes. I remember that from Guam they moved back to Rota for a couple of years and then they moved over to Tinian.
- Willens: In about what year?
- Mendiola: Within a couple of years after returning from Guam.
- Willens: What persuaded them to come to Tinian?
- Mendiola: Well, I think my dad during the Japanese time has been going from one island to another. He was one of the supervisors for the Nanyo Gohachi .
- Willens: What is that?
- Mendiola: The Nanyo Gohachi? The statue up in Saipan? The sugar king?
- Willens: I see.
- Mendiola: He was working for that company both as translator and investigator.
- Willens: That was during the Japanese Administration?
- Mendiola: During the Japanese time. Then he had foreseen the opportunity here in Tinian. So he came over and just stayed from then on.
- Willens: Was Tinian an important part of the Japanese agricultural effort?
- Mendiola: Yes, it was very, very important. Like I said, during the Japanese time he was stationed here for one or two years. He was going from one island to another as a translator.
- Willens: Was land on Tinian available then under the Naval Administration for homestead purposes?
- Mendiola: Yes, it was. During the Naval Administration my father could not own land here on Tinian because he owned a lot of land in Rota. He bought a lot of land during Japanese time so he would not be given any free land except for the house lot homestead.
- Willens: And that would have been in the village of San Jose?
- Mendiola: Right.
- Willens: Those are relatively small homesteads, as I recall?
- Mendiola: Yes, it's about 1000 square meters. But he could not get any other homestead.

- Willens: So he could not get any agricultural homestead elsewhere on the island?
- Mendiola: Yes. However, he leased some property from the government that we still leasing it at this time. We have about 300 hectares of leased property where he started his ranching, cattle farming, then farming vegetables, and things like that.
- Willens: Does the family still have land on Rota?
- Mendiola: Yes, we still have that land.
- Willens: What do you remember about your early years of education? Did you go to school here on Tinian?
- Mendiola: Yes, I went to school here on Tinian for kindergarten and then I went to Saipan. I grew up in Saipan and went to first grade all the way up through high school. I graduated from public high school. I think I was the first or second graduate from that school.
- Willens: What year would that have been?
- Mendiola: That's in 1968.
- Willens: As I understand it, there was no high school here on Tinian at the time. Is that correct?
- Mendiola: Yes. That is correct. They only had up to sixth grade. For seventh grade, they had to send you to Saipan, and provide a stipend of about \$50 a month for the sponsors to meet all the expenses.
- Willens: Is that still the situation or is there another school on the island of Tinian now?
- Mendiola: Not at this time.
- Willens: There is a high school now?
- Mendiola: There is a high school now.
- Willens: When you went to school in Saipan did you live with relatives?
- Mendiola: Yes, I lived with my sister, Fremina, the oldest girl in the family. She's married to one of the Saipanese, Mr. Luis Camacho.
- Willens: Luis Camacho?
- Mendiola: Yes. I stayed with them. He is the Personnel Officer right now.
- Willens: I think we may have met Luis Camacho by accident when we were traveling around the island on scooters a weekend or so ago, up near the Camacho property.
- Mendiola: Yes, that's right.
- Willens: So you got to know many of the Saipanese in the course of your education?
- Mendiola: Yes, a lot of my classmates and the class behind us too. Very close friends of mine are in Saipan.
- Willens: After high school did you continue your education?
- Mendiola: Yes, I went to Guam for two years and I attended the University of Guam. I ended up with financial problems. At a meeting of the class, one of my classmates was an Air Force officer going to University of Guam and he said, "Hey, you want to join the Air Force?" I said, "Well, I don't have any money for lunch this afternoon." He said, "No problem, because they're giving free lunch up there if you take the test and physical exam." So I just followed him. Took the test and passed. Within a week . . .
- Willens: You were in the Air Force?

- Mendiola: ... I was in the Air Force. I was in my way to San Francisco.
- Willens: Really?
- Mendiola: Then down to San Antonio, Texas.
- Willens: How long did you serve in the Air Force?
- Mendiola: Four years.
- Willens: What skills or specialties did you become acquainted with?
- Mendiola: All kinds, because I'm very interested in almost everything. So I went to Lackland, Texas.
- Willens: Lackland, Texas?
- Mendiola: And in San Antonio, second, San Antonio. And then after the graduation they asked us what do you want to be? I say, "Put me on a plane." So I end up in Senuth, Illinois.
- Willens: Where?
- Mendiola: The University of Illinois. There's an Air Force training school down there. I went into aircraft fuel systems.
- Willens: That the facility was somewhere in southern Illinois, near Champaign and Urbana?
- Mendiola: Yes, Champaign, that's right.
- Siemer: Senuth Air Force Base?
- Mendiola: Senuth Air Force Base, right.
- Willens: I see. So then, did you actually fly or was this a land maintenance skill?
- Mendiola: No, maintenance. I worked on the fuel lines especially on the new jet fighters, computerized fuel systems.
- Willens: During what years did you serve in the Air Force?
- Mendiola: I was there to 1974.
- Willens: I see. So during the 1970 to 1974 period did you visit Tinian?
- Mendiola: Oh, that's the first thing I did after basic training. Because day and night I was crying out there, trying to figure out work and what was I doing out here? I thought my dad was mean during the time before I went into the Air Force. But when I found out that those instructors are meaner than a dog. I just about cried every night trying to figure out what am I doing here? (Laughing as he speaks.)
- Willens: So at that point Tinian and your father looked pretty good?
- Mendiola: Oh yes, it's better. It's better. Because I thought getting up early in the morning like 6:30 or 7:00 o'clock to go feed the cows, and feed the pigs and everything, and cut the grass on the farm and pick up the vegetables, was hard, but after going through military training, that's peanuts compared to what we went through.
- Willens: When do you recall hearing for the first time that there were going to be negotiations with the United States about a future political status for the Northern Marianas?
- Mendiola: I think in 1972 I took a vacation and came back here and my dad was talking to me about the negotiations. Instead of going through Guam, or joined with Guam, there was talk around that we are going to relate directly to the United States and are starting negotiations. That was in 1973, I think. It was 1973 when I came out from the military.

- Willens: The separate negotiations began officially in December of 1972 but they did not really get underway until 1973. Was your father a member of the Popular Party at the time or the Territorial Party?
- Mendiola: My father was in the Popular Party since he was born. What happened with the political system here is that they come and say, you're Democrat or you're Republican, and automatically you have to have it in your blood. It's not your opinion or your decision or whatever but the indoctrination. If even a dope runs as a Democrat, if you're a Democrat you vote for him. That's what happened during that time.
- Willens: The Popular Party on Saipan included among its leaders people like Ben Santos, Ben Camacho, Herman Q. Guerrero. They did want to have initially a future political status that would involve reintegration with Guam. But the Guamanians voted against that in 1969 and so the Popular Party leadership tried to get separate negotiations started with the United States. Was your father part of that team of Popular Party leaders that had the same aspirations?
- Mendiola: Yes, he does. But the problem during that time and all the current resentment about the Covenant on Tinian was that these people never came over to Tinian and explain what's happening. They just go ahead and start negotiating with Guam. They do it up in Saipan and then just call you on the phone and, "Hey, we're doing this. And we're going to do it, whether you like it or not."
- Willens: Tinian did have two representatives on the Marianas Political Status Commission. Initially they were Frank Hocog and the present mayor, Herman Manglona. Those two representatives had the responsibility of keeping the people on Tinian informed.
- Mendiola: They did not know their own responsibilities.
- Willens: I see. So it's your recollection they did not, in fact, keep the people informed?
- Mendiola: That's very true. And that's why there's a resentment about what's going on. Look at what happened. They give up two-thirds of the island of Tinian. There's no consideration of those homesteaders that are in there. They still haven't settled the problem.
- Siemer: When your father was talking to you about this, was he in favor of the route of reintegration with Guam rather than direct negotiations with the United States?
- Mendiola: He favors both ways. But the reason they're using to sell the negotiations or the Covenant is wrong. They come over here and they said, "Well, vote for the Covenant because they're going to give us food stamps." My father hated that. He worked his entire life, you know, and he provided for fourteen kids and he never begged anyone for food or whatever. That's his belief.
- Willens: Well, later on, the first two members of the Commission from Tinian were replaced by Joe Cruz and Bernard Hofschneider. Did they do a better job of keeping the people of Tinian informed?
- Mendiola: No. No.
- Willens: Was Joe Cruz a political ally of your father or were they more or less rivals?
- Mendiola: No, they're compadres. They're very good friends but, when an issue develops, my father and Joe Cruz will be out there attacking each other. That's the basic problem about my father. That's why I love him so much, you know. It doesn't matter what the issue is, I don't care whether you're my sister, my son, or my daughter, you have to come in, explain to me

and let me understand why, because my understanding is not what you're saying. And this is him

Willens: Well, for our education and for the record, could you give us sort of a brief portrayal of these various members of the Commission from Tinian? I mean, for example, Joe Cruz who recently died was generally viewed as a very colorful, outspoken character. With all due respect for Mr. Cruz, how would you reflect on his personality and his political ability?

Mendiola: Well, he's well-known. He's very smart. And that I think is the basic problem. He looked at some of the people and some of the other politicians as dummies. He knows better and he wants to be up there. That's Joe Cruz.

Willens: You think he looked down on some of the people who he felt were not as intelligent as he was?

Mendiola: Yes. He's really a good friend. He's a very nice person but wants to, when it comes to political issues or things like that, he wants to be followed, he wants to lead. He's real good. He's very smart. But the problem is he doesn't explain to the people what he is doing.

Willens: Well, he got elected to the Congress of Micronesia at a very early stage and seems to have had an active political career here on Tinian.

Mendiola: Yes, he did. Even in Saipan, because everybody looked at him as one of the smart people who went to school in the United States. And he knows how to speak English very well. He put out a newspaper and was very popular. But I think the basic problem, looking back over what had happened, was that he never really explained things, what he was doing. And, you know, at that time our people were not very educated and he was maybe the only one that could read a book.

Siemer: Where had your father been educated?

Mendiola: He was educated in Japan.

Siemer: Where, if you remember?

Mendiola: I don't know. He was going to school in Rota and then was sent to Saipan on a scholarship. He stayed in Saipan to finish high school and then was sent to Japan. Almost all his brothers went to Japan during the Japanese time for school.

Siemer: So he spoke Japanese very fluently?

Mendiola: Very much so.

Siemer: Where did your father learn to speak English?

Mendiola: He doesn't speak that much English, but if he gets mad he really does. He knows what he's talking about; he used to call me in and say words that I couldn't even tell anybody what he said in Chamorro. And he wanted me to translate it and I just turned around and said, "No, I can't do that. You know, have a little respect for this guy."

Willens: Did he feel uncomfortable in using the English language, and think he was at a disadvantage?

Mendiola: I think he may have been at some disadvantage, especially when some people incorrectly translated for him. So that's why we are very close; after I came back from the military I usually translated for him.

- Willens: Once you came back from the military did you participate with him in evaluating the negotiations and ultimately the Covenant?
- Mendiola: Yes, we're very close. He was saying that the Covenant's good. But the individuals representing the people were not doing it right.
- Willens: How about the present Mayor, Mr. Manglona. Did he make an effort to keep the people informed?
- Mendiola: The problem about Mayor Manglona and Frank Hocog is that they were very young at the time. Frank Hocog was my classmate. And Herman was only a year ahead of me. They were young going into the negotiations. I think that's the reason why they withdrew halfway, because they couldn't handle Joe Cruz, Olympio Borja and those other people.
- Willens: What is your understanding as to why Mayor Manglona was replaced by Joe Cruz on the Commission?
- Mendiola: I don't know. I think he just gave up.
- Willens: And Bernard Hofschneider? What is your recollection of his standing at the time and his performance?
- Mendiola: Bernard Hofschneider is a very quiet person. He's very smart. Give him some paperwork to do and he's good, but not in an open speech or open argument. That's about the only thing. That's why Joe Cruz was looked up to again, because he's the only one who's standing, fighting and talking. And that's the basic problem. He's very smart. The guy's very smart and very knowledgeable of what's happening. The problem is not bringing what he has negotiated back to the people.
- Willens: Let me ask about a specific problem that developed in May of 1973. This was the second round of negotiations and for the first time the United States was putting forth its plans with respect to Tinian and some land on Saipan as well. But just before the negotiations began, the *Pacific Daily News* on May 16, 1973, had a headline about two inches in height to the effect that the United States wanted the entire island of Tinian. And there was a leaked report from the Defense Department to the effect that the military wanted to take the entire island of Tinian; they wanted to purchase it, not lease it; and then they wanted to lease back the southern one-third to the local citizens, who they would remain under the control of the military. This caused considerable dismay and unhappiness not only here on Tinian but to some extent in Saipan as well because no one had anticipated that the United States would make such an extreme request. So it generated a lot of publicity and ultimately Ambassador Williams came over to Tinian to try to explain the situation to the people. And there were some public meetings where the people were free to ask questions and plans were set forth and translated and your father was an active participant in those meetings. Do you remember attending any public meetings in 1973 or would that have been when you were still back in the United States?
- Mendiola: No. I think there were two times that Williams came over here. The last time was just to finalize the negotiations and that's the time when I participated. Everything had been wrapped up. That's why they had signs on the airport saying that we don't need the military, we want to be something else or whatever, all young kids. That was at the instigation of my sister and my father, because they came over to finalize the Covenant without having explained to the people what was going on. They only came here like twice throughout the negotiations, the middle part and the last part. It had already been negotiated that two-thirds of the island would be taken, without any consideration of the farmers and all of those who owned or used the land. Tinian was not guaranteed

something within the Covenant like financial assistance, although there was lot of funding coming in from the military retention areas during the previous administration. But the money was going straight to Saipan and not to Tinian or Rota at that time. During that same time we found out that Saipan got special housing assistance, most of the houses here were tin roof houses, whereas Saipan homeowners could enjoy a loan, an \$8,000 loan, for a concrete, three-bedroom house. I think that only one or two of those houses were funded at that time on Tinian. The rest of them were kept in Saipan and were never offered to the people of Tinian. Also, the original United States proposal involved moving the village of San Jose over to another portion of the island the Carolinas area.

Willens: What's it called?

Mendiola: Carolinas.

Willens: And the people were promised new houses, new infrastructure, as well as the various federal programs that you mentioned earlier. Do you have any recollection whether you and your father thought that relocation of the village would be a good deal for the citizens of Tinian?

Mendiola: That's another issue. When they had finished negotiating and were almost all agreed, they came over here and we almost had a riot. They told us that you guys have to relocate tomorrow and move to the Carolinas. You have to remember that these people are from Yap, Rota, and some from Saipan. But the majority are from Yap, and these people live close to the water. That was the main concern when the negotiators said that the people are going to be moved to the Carolinas. Why are you going to take us away the beach down there where we go fishing. What had happened was that they just negotiated the relocation without coming to Tinian and putting the issue before these people. They wanted the people to be removed without being asked first. Another problem is that the people here very proud. So all this comes back to fact that they want to be really involved. Involved in the negotiations. They want to be informed as to what's going on, but the negotiators stayed in Saipan. Like I said, there were only two public hearings here one in the middle of the negotiations and the other at the end of the negotiations.

Willens: Did your father think that Ambassador Williams tried to present the U.S. view to the people of Tinian directly in a useful way?

Mendiola: Yes. I think he should have concentrated more on the people of Tinian because he considered Tinian as the main bargaining point in the negotiations. My father did not care a lot about the Legislative Branch, the central government, and things like that. He wanted his people to be informed about what's happening on their island. He was the mayor at that time, I believe, and he wanted to know what the hell's going on. But most of the negotiators never did come back and explain what was happening during the negotiations.

Willens: The first time Ambassador Williams came to Tinian in the second round of negotiations, there was a seven-hour meeting in the public hall that was quite well-attended and reported in the *Pacific Daily News* and other newspapers the day after. Ambassador Williams tried his best to answer all the questions that people had. Many of the older people present were supportive of the moving of the village because they thought they would receive better housing, better services. Some of the younger people at the meeting and many college-educated people were very antagonistic and opposed to the U.S. plans. Some of the contemporary reports suggest that the sentiment was evenly divided and that there was a lot of support for the U.S. proposal. Is that different from your own recollection?

- Mendiola: No, that's true. And the problem there, like I said, is they used some words like food stamps, freebies, free housing, free water, free power, to sell the negotiations. That's why my dad, at that time, was so pissed off about it. They should have come out and told the truth that we are going to have taxes, we're going to have all kinds of restrictions. Remember, during the Navy time they just left us alone here. You have your own municipality; make up your own taxes. And they never did explain those facts to the people to think about. That's why I always argued with Joe Cruz. Yes, you did this and you did that, but the way you sold the Covenant to our people was wrong in saying they going to give you a homestead and food stamps.
- Willens: Your father at several points during the negotiations aligned himself with the people who were prepared to lease to the military only one-third of the island of Tinian. And at one point he and others hired a Guamanian law firm to present a petition to the Ambassador and try to bring pressure to bear on the United States to reduce its request for land on Tinian. So there seem to be two schools of thought. One would only lease one-third and the other was prepared to lease two-thirds if other conditions were met. Was that a real difference between the community?
- Mendiola: Yes. Yes, because at that time my father was pushed by the landowners in that area within the two-thirds. Within the two-thirds, they still have homestead and private land ownership and they have not been settled yet. That's why my father offered the one-third within Tinian that had not been homesteaded or been opened for the public to come in and farm and things like that. It's free.
- Siemer: Were the landowners afraid that there would be no adequate compensation?
- Mendiola: Yes.
- Siemer: If the lease came through? Was that based on some past experience that they've had?
- Mendiola: Yes, and they still have not settled the problem as of today. They still fighting in court as to what's the real price of that property. I think it's still in litigation today. And that was my father's basic worry. If you give the land without settling these problems, they will continue forever. And he was really right, he was really right. They never did finalize the negotiations as to what will happen with respect to those leased properties. They put the responsibility on the Commonwealth government to get those people out. That was my father's basis issues: let's settle this and settle it once and for all. Who's going to pay? How much do they get? What's going to be the exchange or whatever? You settle these issues and we'll be okay.
- Willens: He thought that all of these arrangements ought to be resolved to the satisfaction of the people on Tinian before the Covenant was signed.
- Mendiola: Before, yes. A year before he died when he could hardly speak, that's the first question he asked me. I was working for Froilan in Washington, D.C. at that time and he asked me whether these property issues had been settled.
- Siemer: When was that?
- Mendiola: 1985.
- Willens: Is that when he died?
- Mendiola: Yes. He asked me about six days before he died. "Has the property been settled?" I said, "No." And he just said, "I told you people. I have explained to you that you should settle the problem before you give them a chance, because we're going to end up in court." And it's true.

- Siemer: Just to go back for a moment, what had persuaded your father to run for Mayor in the first place when he first became Mayor?
- Mendiola: Well, he was in the Municipal Council. He was one of the political leaders on the island. He had been in the Council for almost 16 years. Most of the mayors that went through had ripped off the municipality or whatever.
- Siemer: Was his principal business farming at that time?
- Mendiola: Yes, farming.
- Siemer: Where was his farm located?
- Mendiola: All over. At that time Tinian was open for farming from one end to the other. The Navy had no restriction as to where you could open up and farm. And that's another thing about the negotiations. The farmers at that time said, "Whoa, if you take two-thirds of the island, where are we going to farm?" Because that's all they know, from the beginning of time, farming.
- Siemer: Where did he sell his produce at the time?
- Mendiola: To Guam. A ship comes in here, picks up all the watermelons, vegetables and takes it to Guam.
- Willens: What was the general attitude of the people here on Tinian to the Ken Jones ranch operation?
- Mendiola: At the beginning it was real good, but after halfway through another problem came up.
- Willens: What was that?
- Mendiola: They were not employing any more local people. They started importing Filipinos, Chinese and whatever, cheaper labor.
- Willens: Was he an opponent of the U.S. request for land because he thought it would interfere with his ranch operation?
- Mendiola: No, I think he was one of the favored guys because he was mentioned in the Covenant and the negotiations. Yes, he pulled some legs at that time in his favor.
- Willens: So you and others thought that he would be fairly compensated?
- Mendiola: Yes. And he succeeded.
- Willens: But you didn't think that the local people were going to be fairly compensated?
- Mendiola: Right. Jones was very involved during the negotiations.
- Willens: Yes. He stood up at some of these public meetings and made himself very visible.
- Mendiola: Even under the table, I believe.
- Willens: I can't speak to that. After this United States request became public and there were meetings over here on Tinian, the Trust Territory government imposed what was called the moratorium on homesteads on Tinian. There was concern at the time about land speculation on Tinian and that certain people would either directly or indirectly acquire land in the northern two-thirds which they then could use to demand high compensation from the United States. Do you have any recollection of the moratorium that was imposed and what the reaction here was?
- Mendiola: Let's see what happened when the moratorium comes out. Again my father calls me up to comment on what happened. He said again that this should be settled before you finalize

- the negotiations. All problems must be resolved before we go another step into these negotiations.
- Willens: Did he think the moratorium was unfair?
- Mendiola: It was unfair, because from the beginning of time these people have been given homesteads. When they were moved over here from Yap, these people were promised homestead properties and things like that.
- Willens: Did you have any concern, or did he have any concern about speculation?
- Mendiola: No, not speculation. No, I don't think so. I think he just thought that the negotiators did not believe that Tinian was ready for development or anything. He's been involved with Saipan negotiators; they look at Saipan first. He just told me right straight in face that for the next 20 or 30 years Tinian would not develop unless Saipan was fully developed and then the leftovers would be given to Tinian. And that's based on his experience.
- Willens: There were some rumors at the time that some more wealthy Saipanese leaders, including one or two members of the Marianas Political Status Commission, were buying land over here at a relatively low price from local people and were holding it in anticipation of making a lot of money. Do you have any knowledge or recollection of those events?
- Mendiola: Yes.
- Willens: Did you regard that speculation as in the interest of the Tinian people?
- Mendiola: No, it was in the interest of the negotiators like Olympio Borja, Eddie Pangelinan, Ben Santos. Right before the negotiation they purchased five hectares of land for \$5,000. Then they sold it for \$200,000 or \$100,000. That's why Eddie Pangelinan has a property in Washington, D.C. from that money. He bought it for \$5,000 during the negotiations. My father told me about that when we found out. But we never did know that those properties were sold.
- Willens: You did not know at the time?
- Mendiola: No. It was only the Barcitas family over here.
- Willens: Which family?
- Mendiola: Barcitas family land that Olympio Borja bought. After the negotiation and they sold the property, he complained that he was taken to Saipan, stayed in a hotel for a couple of days, signed the documents and things like that, and then was shipped back to Tinian. That's why I said there was a lot of under the table here. And still, Eddie Pangelinan, I don't know whether I could believe that guy any more. That's why I was saying during that time that they're taking advantage of almost everybody, Joeten [as well].
- Willens: Was he active here?
- Mendiola: Yes, buying land at that time? Oh, yes, because the information had been given to only to certain people, a certain circle of people in Saipan, these negotiators, and the richest people. And they're the first people who sign the document releasing their property or exchanging their property. Joeten bought 52 hectares here. He exchanged it in Saipan in San Vicente. He owns the whole property. I think half of San Vicente is his in Saipan. That's from the purchase of that property and the documents prove it. Those documents were filed before the negotiations and after the negotiations everybody turned around and exchanged it for Saipan land.

- Willens: That was one of the arrangements that was supposed to meet the needs of the Tinian residents—to provide for exchange of their property on Tinian for land, usually public land on Saipan. That apparently did work out for some people, but it has not worked out to the satisfaction of others.
- Mendiola: It only worked out for those people from Saipan who purchased land, like the negotiators, Olympio Borja, Joeten, Villagomez. Those are the people that bought land here and exchanged it in Saipan. That's why they have so many properties in Saipan right now. But the lower (or poorer) people, like the Cepeda family, they did not know that they could exchange their property so they could get more money by selling land in Saipan.
- Willens: They did not know that?
- Mendiola: No, they were never told.
- Willens: The U.S. delegation announced a change in its plans at one point during the negotiations to the effect that relocation of the village was no longer necessary. Do you have any recollection of your own or from reports from your father as to what the reaction was to that change in plans?
- Mendiola: Yes, that's the time when my father called me and said, "Hey, they changed the relocation of the village, but they still want to keep the port." He wanted me to go to Saipan and start raising hell with Olympio Borja and everybody about the negotiations. They never told us before they go into the negotiations and find out what had happened is that, yes, they are not going to relocate the village, but they going to take the port away.
- Willens: But the idea about the port, as I recall, was that the port was supposed to be equally available for commercial purposes and military purposes. Did you and your father feel that the local citizens were going to be denied access to the port because of its military function?
- Mendiola: No, that is not the problem. They said they could unload some of the bombs and things like that in different areas of the island. So why do they have to keep the port?
- Willens: Your view was that once they were able to load the ammunition elsewhere, they should leave the port completely in civilian hands?
- Mendiola: Right. And that's why he said this is another trick. They said they could unload it here, but at the same time they want the port. And the portion of the port was for joint use is just about 100 to 200 feet of the port the end of the back portion of the port at that time. That really pissed off my father because they already reached that agreement when they came over here to tell us about it. My father was saying, "No. They should, at least, give us 50% of the port; they could use 50% because, if you look at the port, the inner portion is not needed by the military. It's the outer portion that they need because they were talking about big ships coming in. Why take the small port for fisherman and small boats that going back between Tinian and Saipan?" So what he would have agreed to at the time was 50% of the port that's under U.S. control and 50% will belong to the people.
- Willens: From time to time there was talk of the United States spending considerable funds to renovate the entire port so as to make it more modern and efficient for use by local people. Did that have any persuasive effect?
- Mendiola: That's another thing that really bothered us at that time. They said they're going to completely renovate the whole port. At that time they were talking about only about \$4 million to renovate the whole port.
- Willens: Did that ever happen?

- Mendiola: No. Never did happen.
- Willens: When the United States explained its proposal to the negotiators and to the people on Tinian, they would often emphasize the employment possibilities that would benefit the people on Tinian because the base was going to be a large facility that would involve a lot of construction workers. There was talk of many jobs that would be available to the people in the military facility. There was talk about shared educational facilities, and utilities. Did your father and you think that there would, in fact, be some tangible benefits?
- Mendiola: Yes.
- Willens: If the base was actually built?
- Mendiola: That's during the final negotiations when the benefits started coming out. Then before the vote on the Covenant, that was the selling point of the Covenant to the people. You have to remember that two-thirds of the Tinian people voted yes on the Covenant because they were talking about jobs, construction, learning how to start a construction company, and sidewalks, and all the work will be concentrated on Tinian before it's bid out. It's still in the Covenant, I believe, or mentioned in the Technical Agreement. But those never happened.
- Willens: Did you believe at the time that the people of Tinian would benefit in those respects?
- Mendiola: My father never did.
- Willens: Did he think the base was, in fact, going to be built?
- Mendiola: No.
- Willens: One thing that surprised everyone in December 1974, which was very near the end of the negotiations, was that the Ambassador was told by the Defense Department that it no longer intended to build the base in the near future as it had originally represented. So Ambassador Williams told the Marianas Political Status Commission that the military requirements no longer involved immediate construction.
- Mendiola: But that was never mentioned to the people.
- Willens: You do not remember that being told to the people before they voted?
- Mendiola: No. It was never mentioned. Like I said, the selling points again at that time were food stamps, jobs, construction, a lot of offers. My father never believed that a base would be possible here due to the fact that Guam's very close. And they have access property in Guam, which would be cheaper. He never believed that the military was going to build a base here. The only thing this property was needed for was in case there's a world war. If a big war is coming, then the military needed the area.
- Siemer: When your father talked to Joe Cruz about that, did Cruz have a different view? Did he think that the base would be built?
- Mendiola: Yes. He really believed that it's going to be built. We argued during that time, too. Basically my father was trying to explain to Joe Cruz that it's almost impossible because Guam's very close and the full installation is in Guam, so why build another base here? The only time that this would be needed is during war. If there's a world war and that's the time the base would be built up, it would only be a temporary base to support the Guam installation. My father explained that to Joe Cruz.
- Willens: Was your father, then, an active opponent of the Covenant before the plebiscite?

Mendiola: No, he's not an active opponent. It's just something he believed that would never happen. He was saying that the Covenant's good.

Willens: Did he vote for the Covenant?

Mendiola: Yes, he did.

Willens: Did you?

Mendiola: Yes, I did because I was a U.S. citizen. I wanted all my family to be U.S. citizens. That was another selling point: be a U.S. citizen and go to United States anywhere you want. During Trust Territory time every time we went to Guam we were stacked in lines of a hundred people seeking the necessary papers and approvals. It would not be a problem any more if we have U.S. citizenship.

Siemer: Were there many people here at the time, like yourself, who had U.S. citizen status?

Mendiola: Oh, yes, because at that time in Guam there were people working for five dollars an hour. Over here it was 25, 30 cents an hour. So they wanted to go to Guam and get a good job and get paid well. And that's the time, too, when Joe Cruz came up to the meeting, at the front of the municipality, and said that jobs were going to be just like Guam when the military base is open. And Joe Cruz was even taking out his wallet and say, "You see this empty wallet? Once we vote for the Covenant, I'm not going to be like this because all the money is going to rain down." And that's why my father hated what they were trying to do. They were trying to sell the Covenant. He should have just told the truth about what had happened. And they know. After Joe Cruz retired from the government, he just took off because he was being questioned in every corner of the island of Tinian as to where is the food stamp? Where is all the privilege? Where's the military base?

Willens: Do you think he left the island in part because of this dissatisfaction?

Mendiola: I believe so. I think everybody believes that he took his retirement, he's got his pocket full, and takes off to Las Vegas or California or wherever he's staying.

Willens: There were two important provisions in the Covenant that were designed to reflect the special needs of Tinian and Rota. At a late stage in the negotiations the United States agreed to increase the amount of money per year for capital improvement projects and to allocate \$500,000 each year to Rota and \$500,000 each year to Tinian. Did you think at the time that allocating that amount of money for CIP on Tinian would be a benefit?

Mendiola: No, we never did believe that. When I was in the House of Representatives I argued about that, too. Because you are guaranteed only \$500,000 you are going to get only \$500,000. I said, "Wait a minute, CIP is for capital improvement projects. And we don't have any projects on the island of Tinian. It should be reversed. It should be given to Saipan, \$500,000. Give Tinian two or three million dollars until we are developing. It's not what you're guaranteed, it's what you need that you should get."

Willens: Has it been the experience of Tinian that it would receive only the \$500,000 under the Covenant?

Mendiola: I think it's lucky that we're guaranteed \$500,000 or else it would be zero, or zip.

Willens: The second aspect of the Covenant that was designed to protect Rota and Tinian was the requirement of a bicameral legislature with a Senate in which Tinian and Rota would be equally represented with the more populous island of Saipan. Did you feel that the composition of the Senate provided some guaranty of benefits for Tinian and Rota.

Mendiola: Yes.

- Willens: Has it worked out to that effect?
- Mendiola: Yes, it does. But I think they overdo it. What has happened is that, you know, Tinian is not making that much in taxes and things like that and then they join with Rota and say the Mayor's office should have 90 employees. The Council should have 100 people, employees doing nothing. And that's where I disagree. The people should have a little common sense, you know that, that's why Saipan is trying to get rid of that portion of the Covenant. Because when it comes to budget decisions, Tinian gets per capita more than I think it should.
- Willens: Do you think the structure of the Senate has contributed to the political impasse that you see from time to time in the Commonwealth?
- Mendiola: Yes.
- Willens: You served in the Legislature for two terms?
- Mendiola: Two years, yes.
- Willens: One term of two years. Did you elect not to run again or did you run and were you defeated?
- Mendiola: I ran and lost. Then Froilan picked me up to go to Washington, D.C. after he won the election. I was out for two years doing nothing then, luckily, Froilan came back and I asked him for a job and he picked me up. I ended up working all the way to 1989.
- Willens: With him in Washington?
- Mendiola: Yes.
- Willens: You were in Washington for how many years?
- Mendiola: For almost six or seven years.
- Willens: And then you came back and shortly thereafter ran for mayor?
- Mendiola: For the mayorship, yes.
- Willens: What was your platform at the time?
- Mendiola: To have the roads and the schools. And I think I succeeded. But I don't know what happened; just politics. Like everybody I told, politics is not a permanent career to depend on. You get in and you get out.
- Siemer: After the referendum on the Covenant, the Legislature began to debate how to have a constitutional convention election. How many delegates there should be, what the election rules should be, and so on. Did you or your father participate in that at all?
- Mendiola: Not really, because I wasn't involved. I was involved deeply with my father and I had a little business going on. But my father was really concerned about the Constitutional Convention. He was the Mayor at that time and he called all the Constitutional Convention delegates together and they came to a mutual agreement.
- Siemer: Tell us a little bit about that. Who did he call in? And what was the discussion?
- Mendiola: The Con-Con delegates, they got together with the Rota delegates. All issues were to be discussed before going before the Convention. That's the time when they walked out during the discussion about the bicameral legislature. There was Benjamin Manglona, Prudencio Manglona, and they're in contact with my father as to what's being said and what's being done during the Constitutional Convention.

- Siemer: Some of the delegates who were elected from Tinian were quite young at the time, were they not?
- Mendiola: Yes.
- Siemer: Mr. Hofschneider was quite young.
- Mendiola: Hofschneider, yes. Hofschneider and what's the other?
- Siemer: Larry Diaz.
- Mendiola: Larry Diaz. About four of them. Larry was not that young, but Mr. Hofschneider, yes.
- Siemer: And Jose Cruz. There were five from Tinian. The political party affiliations at the time seem to be that Mr. Cruz was in the Popular Party and the other four seemed to be in the Territorial Party, but sometimes it's hard to tell from the records. Was that the case?
- Mendiola: Yes, I think during that time they said it's non-political but in Tinian, even though you view it as an outdoor toilet, you know, politics which one is the Democrat toilet and the other one's the Republican toilet. It always works into politics, but really one good thing about it is that afterwards, after being elected as delegates, they get together and really concentrate on what had happened during the Trust Territory. The one mistake that they made is that the governor may delegate the mayor the authority on local government. That's why in the Second Constitutional Convention we turned that around and made it automatic; the governor "shall delegate" the authority to the mayor.
- Siemer: What did your father and others think was the primary goal that Tinian had in the Constitutional Convention?
- Mendiola: The primary goal was to stop the practice of getting Rota and Tinian secondhand equipment and opinions with everything decided in Saipan. What had happened at the time is that all decisions had been made in Saipan. Everything that you want to do in Tinian and Rota has to be approved in Saipan.
- Siemer: Were they particularly concerned that decisions be made on the island?
- Mendiola: What they wanted is that something that is predominantly local should be decided on the island of Tinian. Even during my mayorship, if somebody on Tinian wants to build a septic tank, Saipan has to approve it. That's the basic problem we were facing during that time. Why should Saipan sign it? Whether it's the right design or right depth or whatever; it should be signed by the inspector here.
- Siemer: So you wanted approval authority here on the island?
- Mendiola: Yes. On something predominantly local.
- Siemer: What about the supervision of those public services people who were working on the island? All of the Commonwealth services employees would report to the governor and with its large population Saipan would be influential in electing the governor. How did the Tinian people think they could get Commonwealth services on the island that were not going to be controlled by the governor in Saipan?
- Mendiola: I think that's the portion now we're looking at between the Governor and the Rota and Tinian mayors. The governor is trying to say that the central government still has the power to control all of the department heads on Tinian and Rota. But I believe that it shouldn't be that way. We should be separate. The President of the United States cannot come down to the town or the city and say I'm going to fire your attorney general, State attorney general, something like that

- Siemer: So at that time what the Tinian delegates were looking to do was to get control of the public services so that they'd be rendered on the island and controlled from the island?
- Mendiola: Yes. It was at the Second Constitutional Convention that we really spelled out in Amendment XXV who will have the responsibility for that. But at the First Constitutional Convention it's a little bit like begging the government to give us the authority. If the governor wishes to give us the authority, he will give it to us; if the governor doesn't, he won't. That's when Governor Camacho overrode Rota when they had government representatives down there. Like what's happening now in Rota. I think Froilan is trying to be like Governor Camacho but I don't know.
- Siemer: Was he that way in Washington?
- Mendiola: Yes, a little bit. But I didn't know that he was that strange.
- Siemer: What else besides public services were the Tinian delegates particularly concerned about in the Constitutional Convention?
- Mendiola: On this?
- Siemer: At the First Constitutional Convention.
- Mendiola: I think at that time we were not very experienced. We tried to get as much as possible. We tried to get the document as clear as possible and as good as any constitution in the United States. But the experience of controlling our central government was simply not there.
- Siemer: How did those delegates do, Mr. Diaz, Mr. Hofschneider and the others, at reporting back to the people in Tinian during the Constitutional Convention about what was being considered, what votes were coming up, and things like that?
- Mendiola: Compared to the record of reporting back regarding the Covenant, I think they also failed in reporting back. But one delegate, Henry Hofschneider, did come back and explain to my dad what was going on. Not all of them. But one of the delegates was young, aggressive and wanted to be in politics. So he looked to all these old people for advice and what's the best way to go about it. But the rest of them are too macho, I think, to come back and tell us. One thing good about having, you know, five delegates or three or four delegates, you'll find one who is really up to par with the local people and explaining at least to the leadership what's going on.
- Siemer: How did the relationship between Rota and Tinian work during the Constitutional Convention? Did they have joint meetings and look for joint positions?
- Mendiola: I think they got real close for the benefit of the government here, based on their experience during the Trust Territory and the Navy. I think Benjamin Manglona had a long experience of being ignored. Prudencio Manglona had a long experience of being annoyed by Saipan and other districts of the Trust Territory.
- Siemer: How about some of the other Rota delegates? Pedro Ogo, Leon Taisacan. People like that. Were they familiar with the real situation in Tinian?
- Mendiola: Not really because those people were never in politics. Pedro had been a teacher for, I think, all his life. And Taisacan worked for something in government, but was never involved publicly.
- Siemer: What about some of the younger Rotanese delegates. Pedro Atalig, David Atalig and Greg Calvo. Had they had any experience on Tinian? Did they have relatives here?

- Mendiola: Yes, they did have relatives. One thing about Tinian and Rota during that time, everyone called my father Uncle Felipe. One way or the other, about ten generations down there, ten cousins, 15 cousins, 50th cousin, the custom still exists. They really respect my dad. When my dad asks them what's happening, they would tell him the truth. That was a good thing about that time.
- Siemer: Were there things that developed during the First Constitutional Convention that troubled your dad because he thought they would lead to difficulties in the future?
- Mendiola: I think the first is representation within the government and control of the public services on the islands. All my father's experience as mayor in dealing with the central government is being elaborated to the delegates. During that time I think they were very close to solving these problems. That's why it hurts me at the next election, because I thought it was going to work out. But it didn't.
- Siemer: One of the issues that came before the Constitutional Convention was abolishing the municipal councils. What did your dad think about that?
- Mendiola: I think he agreed to it.
- Siemer: He thought it'd be more efficient?
- Mendiola: Yes. I think he said since we're commonwealth, let's look at the concern of the overall commonwealth instead of just Tinian itself. But make sure there is some proviso that the needs of the island of Tinian are being addressed.
- Siemer: What was the experience here after the municipal council was abolished? Did that work out?
- Mendiola: No, it didn't because they gave the power to the legislative delegation and they never did anything. I think, though, if we put different people in there, it might work. But it has not worked yet.
- Siemer: When the Constitutional Convention got very close to the end, there was a walkout over the issue of the composition of the lower house. The first proposal had been 25 for Saipan, and three for Rota, two for Tinian. Then there had been a compromise at 16 for Saipan, and two for Rota, one for Tinian. And then, Justice Villagomez wanted to reduce it further to 12 for Saipan, one for Rota and one for Tinian. That debate went on for quite a long time, but it ultimately caused some of the delegates to walk out. What do you recall about any of the consultations that the delegates had with your father and other people back here on Tinian about whether they should walk out?
- Mendiola: I think they were in very close contact. During that time I was not on Tinian but was going back and forth. But I think were in contact very closely as to the composition of the legislature.
- Siemer: In the end only Joe Cruz walked out. The other four Tinian delegates stayed. Was there any political fallout about that here? Did people think they should have walked out?
- Mendiola: I don't know about the sentiment of the people, but my father was really pissed off at the delegates about it. Like I said, [they were] young delegates. And you have to remember that some of these people like Henry Hofschneider did not want to make a decision in there.
- Siemer: Esteven King was one of them.
- Mendiola: Esteven King, yes.

- Siemer: Was one of them that did not walk out.
- Mendiola: I don't know what was going on during that time. It was perhaps just because they did not know what would be the end result. I believe that the only thing that would have made that successful was to have all the Rota delegates walk out.
- Siemer: Ben Manglona walked out and three others. The Rota delegation had eight members. But four of the Rota delegates and four of the Tinian delegation stayed. And, of course, under the rules of the Convention, so long as one delegate from each island was there, the Convention could go on. That was the threat, because under the enabling legislation the Convention could not go on anymore if the walk out had been successful. So they would not have been able to get a constitution out because the proceedings would have been brought to a halt. But Henry Hofschneider and others from Tinian stood up in the Convention and were concerned about their duty to get a constitution finished that they could put before the people. Let me just go back and ask you whether you were here on the island when the public hearings on the constitution occurred?
- Mendiola: I wasn't.
- Siemer: Where were you at that time in 1976?
- Mendiola: Oh, boy. I was flying all over the world, I think. (Laughs.)
- Willens: Let me just conclude by asking a few further questions about the negotiations that led to the Covenant and its aftermath. Many of the political leaders on Saipan were very dissatisfied with the governance of the TTPI Administration. They felt a real urgency to seek a new political status as quickly as possible. Did you and your father and political leaders on Tinian feel the same sense of dissatisfaction with the TTPI during the 1960's and the early 1970's?
- Mendiola: Yes, a little bit. But not so much, I believe, that could push us to a fast negotiation.
- Willens: Would your father have been willing to stay as part of the TTPI for another five or ten years?
- Mendiola: Right. His main point there is that our people are not educated yet. They're not that educated. The problem is that during the negotiations most of the consultants or the lawyers were coming in from the United States. And anything that might change the system of the United States would not be touched by these consultants.
- Willens: Did your father have some skepticism about the Commission hiring U.S. lawyers to advise it?
- Mendiola: Right. His advice in the beginning was to get somebody either from Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong, from the Philippines or other nations that can look at the document to see whether it's really all in favor of the United States or in favor of the Northern Marianas. He was even thinking at that time to call up the U.N. to assist us, but it was never done.
- Willens: But as you recall his sentiments at the time were that he felt that more time under the TTPI Administration might provide more education for the people and perhaps more infrastructure and so forth?
- Mendiola: Right. Yes. You have to remember at that time it was only Eddie Pangelinan that came in as a lawyer on the delegation. And most of the work on the Covenant should be done by lawyers. We didn't even have a doctor at that time. They're all medical officers. What we were thinking at that time is: could we prolong this for another ten years and request that the United States provide scholarships for our students. Right after graduation, they could

work with the United States government evaluate how it works. Evaluate other nations. How is it going to work? Then come back and we could start the negotiation. But his basic thinking at that time was that we pushed too early while our education standards were not that high.

Willens: Another issue that motivated the leaders on Saipan was their conviction that the Northern Marianas should go a separate way from the rest of Micronesia. They thought the differences among the districts were so great that there really was no political future in trying to keep all six districts together in the future. Did you and your father have any sense that perhaps more of an effort should be made to keep the Northern Marianas as part of a united Micronesia?

Mendiola: I think I would again go back to the need for education. When people use the culture and custom it's not that really. My father really believed that argument, his custom and culture way down could not be erased or changed. Most of the negotiators or the leaders at that time are U.S. indoctrinated. They have been to the U.S. They have seen the good life and good things during that time and they wanted not to be identified together with the Trust Territory. Saipan was going so high so fast, developing so fast, while the Trust Territory was just laying still, very calm, not trying to improve their standard of living or things like that. But really it was the Western indoctrination that came into Saipan that really changed those things here.

Siemer: Was there much contact or commerce at that time with people on Tinian and people elsewhere in Micronesia?

Mendiola: Yes, they were in contact. But the problem about Micronesia is just coconut trees, you know, under the coconut tree. They went to leave it as it is but I think the leaders in Saipan wanted to change. If you're going to wait for the Trust Territory, we're going to wait another ten, 20 years.

Willens: I'm wondering whether you and your father thought that if there was another ten years or longer, maybe all of the districts of Micronesia might be able to stay together in some form of united government?

Mendiola: No, he was just thinking that our educated population was not that large at that time. He believes that, yes, Olympio Borja, [Ben] Santos have experience in politics. But those are local politics. My father did not believe that they should be leading the negotiations. Most of the negotiations would be legal documents. Some of our people should be educated enough to face you at that time. Our people do not want to face you; they're scared of you. Because you're white, not only white, you're a lawyer and you're smart enough, so the people just laid back and didn't want to talk to you about anything because they cannot explain themselves. That's what my father was thinking.

Willens: The last question I want to raise goes to the fact that now, by 1995, the U.S. military has really made no use whatsoever of the land leased on Tinian. There have been occasional exercises, I gather, from time to time over the past 15 years. Is it your sense that efforts should be made to try to obtain more use of the land on Tinian for the people?

Mendiola: We tried but, you know, working with the military's the hardest. I don't know whether they still have plans for the next 20 years, which they always do. But they do not tell us what's happening. What had happened right now is that when I was the mayor and we start negotiating, I wanted them to start where my father had, you can have one-third of the island.

- Willens: There were active negotiations while you were mayor as I recall to try to increase at least the amount of land that was leased back to the people for economic development. What was the ultimate upshot of those negotiations?
- Mendiola: I think out of the two-thirds they took two-thirds within the two-thirds. It's not 50-50. My negotiation position at that time was 50-50. You take that portion in North Field from the coast down. The rest should be released with no conditions attached.
- Willens: Did they release any portion of it under conditions that would be sufficient for economic development?
- Mendiola: Yes. I think it would be sufficient. It will be sufficient for the next 15 years. But what I wanted was to open up another homestead area for Tinian, not on a big scale but at least a small housing area.
- Willens: Is that going forward?
- Mendiola: I don't know whether they going to do it right now or not but they already released it. I don't know what's going to happen.
- Willens: Thank you very much, Mr. Mendiola. Is there anything that we haven't asked about that you'd like to say for the record with respect to Tinian and its current status?
- Mendiola: Well, not really. The problem I'm looking at now is internal. It relates to our leaders. I would like to ask you for your help to turn them in the right direction with a sledge hammer hit on the head to get them straightened out.
- Willens: Well, we'll bring it to conclusion. Thank you very much for your help.