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Rafael Reyes
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Unknown Interviewer – Majority of interviews conducted by Rose Manibusan or Daniel Martinez.

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Interviewee: Ralph Reges

Military Rank: NPS superintendent

Interviewer: Unknown

Guam

Date: January 29, 1992

[00:00]

Q2: Mr. Ralph Reges who does oral history for the World War II in the Pacific: the Occupation of the Japanese.

Q: There's about six minutes on this roll.

Q2: Are we rolling?

Q: Okay

Q2: Oral history: Mr. Reges, take 92--12, 23

Q: Okay, Ralph we are wondering what are your recollections about the Japanese invasion and attack on Guam beginning December 8th thru December 10th?

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Reyes: Well, that morning, we just didn't know anything really about what was going to happen because we didn't hear any radio forecasts or anything like that. I was fifteen, I recall, and I was more the errand boy, the general house boy at my home. So, my errand that day was to take my niece down to the church; it was the eighth of December the lady of the Immaculate Conception day, and this has always been a big day in Guam, a big fiesta. We were at church at that time and then about halfway through the mass at the cathedral we heard this sound of planes, not just a sound of one plane, but a sound of a whole bunch of planes that are coming kind of [unclear] to us. And then we heard some explosions and then the priest

finally turned around he was facing the altar and then he turned around to us and he said “The mass has ended; make yourselves to your homes because Sumay was just bombed by the Japanese”. Everybody went berserk, they were running all over the place, they were screaming.

Q2: Mr. Reges, take 24.

--00:02:56

Q: Okay Ralph, you mentioned at the mass the priest had stopped the mass, and Sumay had been bombed by the Japanese?

Reyes: Yes, that's right. Then everybody just started running out of from the church, running all over the place screaming, and some people were screaming. I managed to get my niece down to my sister in Agana, which is not very far from the church. Then I went right back and started running back to my home in Agana heights. When I got home my father and the rest of the family were all gathered there and they were asking me what did I hear, anything I can tell them about what's going on. Finally the planes started hitting Agana; I remember my brother worked at the radio communication station in Agana and his building was one of the main targets I guess in Agana, so that was it. I guess it depends on how large a family or how mature your families are, some families have real little kids, I'm the youngest, which is fifteen, I think we were kind of fortunate that we didn't have any babies to carry around. We just started gathering stuff, everything from dishes and pots and pans and things like that, getting ready to make it in to the boonies. We haven't got any instructions or anything like that yet because the invasion has not occurred, until maybe a day after is when the invasion started coming in, it was just chaos--we never expected anything. My dad is a very responsible person, I want to talk about him because he was really a very loving father, but he kind of managed us, to supervise our work and what to do and all of that, so we started preparing the bull carts, loading it up with stuff, provisions, clothing, whatever we had, ready for the move.

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We didn't have any plans as to where we were going to go, we thought that maybe we would get the

neighbors together and talk about where our destination was going to be, to stay away from the bombings, we didn't know how long it was going to last, well that was the first day, the bombing stopped in the evening and then it started again the following morning, followed by the invasion. I was fifteen, I was kind of happy-go-lucky kid, but like I said I am the errand boy, my dad's right-hand man because my older brother was in the States, he was in the navy and my other brother has got his own family, we managed, and then it went on. My aunt my mom's sister is a widower, and my dad sent me to help her out, she lived right across from us, maybe about a half mile away. I went and stayed with her for the duration of the war, I helped her as ordered from my dad. So when we started securing our surrender badges where we have to march down to Agana to go through the process of getting the badge,--meaning that you have surrendered, you put the badge on your lapel. The whole scene is really different, we were in a different environment because as we walk over to this place walking down San Ramon hill, we got to Agana, we saw the Japanese troops occupying---

--00:08:31

Q2: I'm sorry we are out of film. Oral history War of the Pacific Mr. Reges 92—13, take 25.

Q: Ralph we were talking about just after the Japanese invasion you and your aunt were going to secure passes from the Japanese?

Reyes: That's correct. We were alerted that we needed to secure passes--

Q2: Please keep rolling, please Ralph start with my aunt and I because you were answering with yes—

Reges: My aunt and I were walking down San Ramon Hill—

Q2: Stop for a second, the airplane. Oral history, Mr. Reges, take 26.

--00:09:43

Reyes: My aunt and I were walking down San Ramon hill and it appears like we felt— like we were entering a brand new environment--something we had never seen before--there were soldiers all over the place, both sides of the street; they were occupying the homes there that the owners had vacated. The scenes are really something strange too because some of them will be heating water in a fifty five gallon drum, they would be in there dunking themselves naked, taking their bathes. At this point my aunt was kind of embarrassed, she felt very embarrassed, and she was pinching me and all that as we were walking by and she was just saying, “don’t look at them, those animals”. Any way we went and secured our badges, and we felt free to roam around.

Q: I understand you were involved with the Japanese forced labor, surveying the town later on as the Americans were preparing to come back home, how were you selected for the forced labor and what specific projects were you involved in during the forced labor?

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Reyes: There were people selected to sort of run the program, they were appointed like commissioners, where they in turn will provide the Japanese with the able bodies that were available, the dependability of the people that he selects. For one thing my reputation as a very hardworking boy, it went about that they can trust me and all that, so I guess that was why I was included. I was quite young still because I was out there with people over my age, fifty, sixty years old, I’m still a young punk so to speak. But we have different work destinations, there are the details, there are alerts that come out, we were summoned in the morning we were going to be going either which way north, south, east, west. There are different types of details, one was the manganese crew, I was involved a couple of days--replacing my brother-in-law, who was one of the permanent crew for that, but he was sick, so they needed replacements, so I replaced him, this is the manganese crew--we went out, they took us to the site with pick and shovels, we started just mining and selecting the metal that we found. I didn’t find that very interesting because most of those people that were assigned there were military people--military prisoners--and I was just replacing my brother in law. But, the other one was the civilian group, like, my group we went down to Asan point, we went down to Agana, where we dug tunnels and fox holes and all that kind of stuff. It was really different working with blueprints from working just until everything stopped, because when everything stopped you don’t think a

lot like engineers to see that it works out pretty good, so they figure these things we're building at the time is a hustle job in preparation for the invasion by the American forces, so that is why it was all haphazardly done. We were under forced labor, we had very brief breaks, just working, moving all the time, there was no lagging around. The method that they used which I was very disappointed afterwards--meaning that I found out the end results later on—is that everything was done with raw materials, the cement was alright, the rebars are okay, but the sand, gravel, and water, which makes the composite of a good cement mix is raw material. We were hustling, we start putting up the forms and no sooner we are done with this structure, we started mixing the cement and started pouring it in. We are hustling, everything is a hustle, we are building points, there is really no resting or anything. So we ran out with our buckets, fill them up with sand, take them in, pour it down on the ground to where they are going to mix the cement, then we ran out got the salt water and then start mixing the cement, then after it is done we are going to have to move to another project, which is nearby down at Asan point, there is a whole bunch of fence structures there and they are just about a feet apart. But what they wanted us to do is to use the same material before that we used from this one that we poured, so that we can prepare to pour another one the next day, so the first thing we do the following morning is tore the forms off and start building another one, and that is where I think--I don't know can you cut this one? I don't now if I should mention--

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Q2: Mr. Reges, 27

Q: Ralph, maybe you can go into a little bit about the actual working conditions, and how you were treated by the Japanese during this period of forced labor?

Reyes: Good behavior is about the only thing where you can survive being hit, slapped or being poked on the side with a bayonet or even struck with a bayonet. I'm a pretty well behaved person, I take orders, I know that it is not with my willingness, but I just wanted to survive. We just didn't have any breaks--I mean a five minute break was a five minute break, you can't even go and potty, you have to be back on time and all that. The working condition is very bad, it is really forced labor, it reminds me of the slavery in the South in one of the movies that I've seen later in my life where your individual right is completely ignored.

They're there and they have an eye for everybody, so we have a group of maybe ten, sixteen, twenty people and then there are maybe three or four guards, but each one of them is really keeping an eye on getting the ball rolling, this is towards the end of the war or it is maybe approaching the two year mark of the war
[phone call]

--00:19:26

Q2: Oral history World War II in the Pacific, Mr. Reges 92—14, take 27

Reyes: This was towards the latter part of the war is when we're talking---

Q2: Oral history World War II in the Pacific, Mr. Reges 92—14, take 28

Reyes: It was about maybe two-thirds of the war when things are--we talk about those things, we discuss it as we work quietly, and then when we get home after we're released that day we talk more about it, what we think was going on and we try to piece things together. We just felt that at this time I think that they were feeling a defeat that their troops are regressing, that they are maybe running out of food and materials and all that, so we thought that maybe this hurry up job was causing that, and it really was a hurry up job, there's no rest, so we worked from sunrise to sunset and then when we get home we find the chores at home waiting for us that wasn't done that day, so just double up our effort to get the ball rolling at the home also.

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Q: I understand you served as a former superintendent at the park where these landing places and pillboxes are located at Asan, while you were the superintendent how do you feel administering these placements that you were forced to give, what were you feeling as the superintendent of the park?

Q2: War of the Pacific, Mr. Reges, take 29

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Reyes: I would say that being the superintendent or being selected to be the superintendent is mostly a part of my participation in the war. I was selected I believe very much for my experience in the war, in fact when we had the tenth anniversary in August of 1988, I made a statement when I was delivering my speech that I am claiming as part in history for being the only superintendent in the National Park Service who is now helping to protect and preserve those that I unwillingly helped to construct, that comment that I made went over pretty good because it is a fact, nobody ever challenged that claim, so I must be the only one managing it. I have my heart and soul in that job and my participation I think is geared more due to my experience because I feel that even though I lack the science required to be a superintendent--some of the science--I feel that my participation as superintendent was pretty good at least I get good grades. [Laughing] Protecting it--they are deteriorating fast because of the fact like I mentioned earlier that it wasn't done for a lifelong building, it was done temporarily just so they could protect themselves when the invasion troops were coming onto the shores, that is why it was done like that, and I mentioned this to the architects that this may have been the cause of why it is really disintegrating into pieces now, because of using raw material in order to finish the structures. I have my heart and soul in this project, every time I look at the structure it makes me think back and it just brings back bad memories for the brutality that came along with it to try to have them done.

--00:26:06

Q: I understand just very shortly before the American liberation in Guam, the first march as well as the internment at Manenggon, would you like to share some memories or experiences during that period?

Reyes: This may be a month or two before the American invasion, like I said every village--work groups had different work destinations, I was very unfortunate because I was still fairly young still and working with those stronger people. I was selected to march to a destination down in Tumon to plant or lay mines on the shores as tank barriers. We weren't told what we were going to be doing when we were being assembled to march down there, but as soon as he said Tumon somebody popped up and said 'Frank just got killed there yesterday with a mine explosion', which was true, I don't know how we got the word Frank was killed, but it was an incident that took place and everybody was terrified when we were going to that detail to relieve the guys that were there. But we marched, we managed, we got just about every little

thing we could munch on and went to that long travel, walking the rugged terrain, rounding again and going up to the [unclear] up to the Tumon overlook and then down to the Ladera, down to this beach area in Tumon.

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And there was an incident that I thought maybe I can share apart of it with you, it's a personal tragedy, it was an incident that nobody witnessed, but myself and two other people with me. It was really a very stormy day; it appears, because we never got to this shack--under the floor of a hut that was built on stilts. It started to rain really hard, we were outside and it started to rain real hard, then we started to crawl over there, it was me and four other friends of mine, we crawled in shoulder to shoulder under this hut, we got just about a foot and a half clearance just enough to crawl in. There were five of us shoulder to shoulder, I was positioned in the center, and then we just wait and pray because as the bombardment starts it appears that every other explosion is coming closer to us. And that's when it finally happened, it must have been the shell ricocheted off the coconut roots right into the hut and the hut was still standing there, but I just grasped for air, I called for my mom, I called the lord started praying. Then when I finally came to I turned to my right and he was Pete to the right of me with a big grin on his face and blood pouring out of his mouth and just about everywhere on his body and then when I went like this to say, "Hi, Pete", he just rolled over because half of his body was gone, the only thing that was holding him--[repeat]--that was left of him was his leg and his right side of his abdomen and his right arm. The flies, the smell of human flesh, it was just too much, I started praying and crying, I regretted not seeing my dad, anyway, I started praying again. And then I looked over to my right, Frank was in front of Pete, he had his foot up or rather his knee up and he was just kind of swinging it with everything---

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Q2: World War II in the Pacific, Mr. Reyes 92--15, 30

Reyes: I couldn't see very clearly, but when I turned to my right there was Frank right in front of Pete, he had his knee up, I couldn't see the other side of him, but he was swinging his knee back and forth, and then

when I went to talk with him that's when I discovered his intestines were all over the place, there was blood coming out from just about every part of his body. I couldn't panic because I knew that it was very uncomfortable, he kept moaning and groaning and then I just started to maneuver myself to this other side and then I was pushing his intestines in to make him more comfortable--I didn't know what I was doing. And then after that I found out also that John and I—John was burned pretty bad with the shrapnel on his left leg, and Ken the guy at the far end had completely survived without a scratch, but I had some scratches on the back of my neck between my shoulder blades. As we started to make our way from under the hut I found that I was kind of limping, it must've been a concussion it could've just bounced me up against the floor of the hut, anyway, we got out of there and then I [phone call]—

Q2: Oral history, Mr. Reges, take 31

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Reyes: Then that's when I found that I was kind of limping because it must've been a concussion, and we managed to get out of there John and I and we climbed over to where my Uncle Ben was located under the lemoncita tree. At that point the Japanese were making arrangements to send the dying and the dead home and for all of his relatives to go with him, and I was--I guess on account of my limping they wanted me to go along with him, so we started out on the Ladera, and that was the end of our detail there as far as the dead and the dying and the five of us that left.

Actually our purpose there was cutting down coconut trees, there are different details, you are detailed to do one thing, another person is detailed to do another thing, my part of the detail was cut down the tree, clear the fronts and the root parts, and then we hold them out to the water and there is another group of people there--group of guys that will tie them in threes, like a triangle, like an architectural scale. And then they will sink it until it's not visible anymore from the surface, and then they will have another group of people handling dynamite and things like that, mines, so they start attaching it to the fronts, that's our purpose, the detail. We advise the people that are taking over our detail about the treatment that we got, and all that that, it was really forced labor.

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Then we manage to bring the two bodies home, one was dying, as we were making ourselves up the Ladera, he even commented ““Why don’t you just leave me here because I know I’m not going to live?”” But then we just managed to carry him home and a few hours later he was gone. Then I made the report to my detail supervisor about what had happened, that we had deaths on our hands and we were going to be burying them and my physical condition was not good, to go ahead and report to work—so he advised to make sure that I’m at home because the plan of going to Manenggon is already in the making and is going to be taking place very shortly, this is that long trail to the war camps, concentration camps. Well again we started packing up our gears putting on the bull carts and making sure we got the right things to take with us, it was going to be a long journey going up to Talafofo.

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There were two camps that people were assigned to go to one was the Manenggon camp, that’s for the people in central Guam and a little bit north of central Guam is the one that goes to Talafofo, known as Mata, that’s the camp where our area finally ended up. We arrived there and we are becoming pros already, doing shelters, just anything to get out of the weather, cutting leaves and putting them together, it was very bad at that time. We’re up at the top of the hill and the river down the Manenggon river that goes over to the other camp is quite a ways down, it’s about maybe a half mile to get to the river to haul water up to the top over the top, that was quite a chore. But we were refrained from making any noise, building fires through the day, any kind of lights or flames at night was strictly prohibited, but we just kind of managed we got together as a group, and there was a lot of cooperation amongst us.

Q2: Oral history Mr. Reges, take 32

Reyes: The long haul going up to Mata in Talafofo, we gathered all our stuff again and put it in the bull cart, and then we started our journey, we just didn’t know where our destination was going to be I say Talafofo, but really at that time we didn’t know where we were headed.

Q2: Oral history, Mr. Reges, take 33

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Reyes: The experience at the camp was really something to remember, it brings your memory, it makes you realize you shouldn't waste any food, shouldn't waste any time, you have to invest in all these things because they are very precious, especially in these kind of situations. We were there for three or four days, we had the freedom to go out to hunt to climb up the coconut tree and get some coconuts to eat and things of that nature. And then I was just climbing up a coconut tree when I hear this [noise], and then I looked over the brush and there was this big fellow--a white person in camouflage uniform--he waved at me, like, without any noise at all or he didn't yell at me or anything like, that he just waved at me, so I just started walking over to him, and I then I found a whole batch of them right behind him, and I just couldn't appreciate anything more than that, and I thought it was really God-given because our people were really suffering at that point, we were running out of food, and we had just about harvested everything that's edible in the jungle, so that was kind of a relief.

Reyes: So when I approached him he started drawing a shape of a flag with a circle on it, and he goes like this, "You Guam, me American" and I was just kind of shocked when he approached me that way, it reminded me of Tarzan and the apes, like, you Jane me Tarzan finally there was a fellow in the back that they called Brooklyn and he started screaming "Let's get out of here, we can't get a damn thing out of this SOB" and that's when I say "Wait a minute, Brooklyn" and the staff leader the guy in the front says "He speaks" everybody was so shocked and they were hugging me because I can speak English, I said "What the heck do you do you expect to find here anyway?" I said, "We went to American schools", "Well we didn't know, sorry if we offended you". I befriended the staff sergeant and once in awhile I hear from him--a Christmas card, he wanted to take me to the States and stay with him rather than go to school, but I turned that offer down. Anyway from there words started coming down that a whole bunch of other marines are coming up to our area to see if they could secure the area, being that some of our group leaders have been wandering in the jungles they used them as scouts to find where the Japanese were hiding out and all of that. A couple of days later I managed to work myself down to Manenggon, of course with the marines guiding us, and that's when I learned about my brother being brutally beheaded, and my dad was in a

concentration camp elsewhere cooking for the Japanese officers. From then on though it's really something a future that is kind of secured for me because the Americans finally landed and we know that we are in safe positions, and then we work ourselves down and start going back to our property and picking things up where we left off.

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Q2: Oral history, Mr. Reges, take 35

Reyes: So, everything was pretty well secured at that time. Back in the days when I was the superintendent they had asked me--one of the reporters from Pacific Stars and Strips asked me "How do I feel about the Japanese?" being that they killed my brother and I was a now being holding my job seeing them everyday coming to visit the center and I said "Well I only really hated one Japanese and that's the Japanese that swung the blade to beheaded my brother, but I don't think he's around here anywhere" I said, I feel all right, I have a very good frame of mind, my attitude is very good about the war. I know the things that the Japanese were doing were under strict orders, this they have to follow because they're sworn in soldiers, just like the American soldiers, they all swear in when they wear the uniform. So what I'm trying to say here is that I think that time is the healing factor on any kind of tragedy. If you take it too hard you might end up in the hospital with a heart breakdown, if you just take it like it was something that was done without them doing it from their own then that's a different thing and that's how I feel. I don't have any hatred for the Japanese, like I said, there is only one person that I hated and that's the guy that swung the blade.

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[END OF INTERVIEW]