

C.N.M.I. ARCHIVES ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
Northern Marianas College

INTERVIEWEE
Mr. Herman Q. Guerrero (ERO)

INTERVIEWER
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THIS PROGRAM WAS MADE POSSIBLE BY THE C.N.M.I. ARCHIVES LOCATED AT NORTHERN MARIANAS COLLEGE. THE INTENT OF THIS PROGRAM IS AIMED AT COLLECTING AND PRESERVING THE KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCES OF OUR ELDERS DURING THE JAPANESE ADMINISTRATION OF THE MARIANAS, THE CUSTOMS AND CULTURES OF THE CHAMORROS AND CAROLINIANS AND THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES AND THE CNMI UNDER THE COVENANT. THIS PROGRAM WAS FUNDED BY THE CNMI COUNCIL FOR THE HUMANITIES. OUR SINCERE APPRECIATION IS ALSO EXTENDED TO OUR LEADERS AND MAN AMKO FOR THEIR DEDICATION IN BUILDING OUR COMMONWEALTH AND PRESERVING OUR PAST FOR THE FUTURE. SI YUUS MA'ASE TODUS HAMYO.

Good Morning, today is June 7th, Wednesday, Year Two-Thousand, and on behalf of the CNMI Archives, here at Northern Marianas College, I would like to take this opportunity to salute and extend our sincerest appreciation to Mr. Herman Q. Guerrero, better known as Ero, for making his time possible to joined us and tell us about his experienced, from the time he started working here in Saipan, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. Also, during the entire time since he started working for the CNMI Government, both as a Congressman and the different positions that he held. Also, back during the time of the negotiation of the Covenant as a Negotiator, the Constitutional Convention where he served as a delegate back in 1976 during the First Constitutional Convention. There are also other services that Mr. Herman Q. Guerrero contributed to the CNMI government. So without further due, let us now start with our interview.

Q. 1: Greetings Mr. Guerrero, can you tell me what year did you first start working and what kind of job did you do?

A: Herb, before I start, let me first thank you for coming up with this kind of program. This program if I am not mistaken will start or have already started on how the government of the Northern Marianas' came about. I thank you for the opportunity to be interviewed by you. upon returning from school in 1959 approximately thirty-years or already thirty-years, I first worked at the Municipal Government. That in English was my "breaking ground". I gained a lot of knowledge and experienced from our elders during those time. There I worked for more than ten years. I worked under the office of the Mayor during that time, Mr. Ignacio Benavente. Former Mayor, Mr. Elias P. Sablan was there, then succeeded by the late Ignacio V. Benavente. Then from the Municipality of Saipan, I moved on to the Trust Territory Government under the Economic Development for the Marianas District Government,

in 1963 all the way till 1966. I then moved on and worked at the Marianas District Legislature. I worked as a Secretary for the District Legislature until 1969. No....I'll take it back, the year 1968. Then in 1969, no 1968, I was hired by Mr. Francisco C. Ada, who was then the District Administrator for the Mariana Islands, to the Executive Branch from the Legislature. I stayed there for almost a year. Then from there , I was elected to represent the Northern Marianas at the Congress of Micronesia. The House of Representatives in 1969. I started my term in January of 1970. I started serving in the House of Representatives representing the Northern Marianas from 1970 till 1974, at the Congress of Micronesia. However, before that, as you will remember, we started our Political Status Negotiation in 1972. I served as one of the Negotiators of the Marianas Political Status Commission until the negotiations were completed in 1975. Then our people voted and approved the Covenant. This was followed by the installation of our Constitutional Government. From here I retired from government services. I did serve in different capacities under the Commonwealth Government and then retired. From there I was on and off with my retirement.

Q. 2: When you first started working in Saipan, you mentioned something like 1969, how much were you getting on an hourly basis, bi-weekly or monthly?

A: Oh boy! at one time the salary.....but I was not working at that time, it was twenty-five cents. I started, if I am not mistaken something like thirty-three cents an hour at the Municipal Office. Until we moved on to the Trust Territory Government in 1963. There were very few local people, Micronesian, not counting workers from the Marianas, but there were very few Micronesians earning a dollar an hour. During those days there were very few, only a handful of people. I was not able to even earned a dollar-an-hour until 1969. It was in 1968 when Mr. Francisco C. Ada hired me at the District Administration and I was earning just about a Dollar

and Three Cents an Hour.

Q. 3: Okay, what year did you enter politics and did you ever run for the Saipan Congress?

A: The Municipal Legislature, Municipal Council, immediately upon my returned from school, in 1959, I think they drafted me that same year or a year later by the Municipal Council.

Q. 4: When I look back at the Political history of the Marianas, for a long time the Democratic Party controlled the District Legislature and the Office of the Mayor here in Saipan. Can you tell me why the people of Saipan have confidence in the leaders of that Party or the Candidates or maybe their platform was good. However, as a member of the Democratic Party and a long time public servant, why do you think the people have so much confidence in you in the past?

A: From the beginning till a.....first of all, in the past the Democratic Party, if I am not mistaken you still remember the two political parties formed back in the early 1950's. First of all, they were called Territorial Party, the other, Popular Party. Back then the Territorial Party is now presently called, Republican Party here in Saipan. The former Popular Party is what is presently called, Democratic Party. From the beginning the motto of the Democratic Party has been the "Party of the Ordinary People." If I can remember, the issue of Politics was new to our people during those days. Because if we really understand it, majority of the people are ordinary and not only in the Northern Marianas, but the entire World. So basically that was probably the main reason the Democratic Party was able to penetrate during those days.

Q. 5: If I am not mistaken, you being one of long time public servant, especially in the area of Future Political Status for our Islands. From reading the political history of the Marianas, we once had a desire to Reunite with Guam. Were you involved with that and how did the interest

of Guam and the Northern Marianas reuniting came about? What were some of the advantages if the Islands were reunited?

A: I think it is good for me to explained the differences between the two political parties. The Territorial and the Popular Party, when first established , when the two parties were not very well versed on the issue of Politics or Political Status, Both Political Parties had the same desire of establishing close relationship with the United States. How to do it and what type of formula and even format was out of the picture. The only concerned was to be a part, part of the United States. Then as time went on, the Popular Party here in Saipan affiliated itself with the Guam Popular Party, because that was the time of the Guam Popular Party and Territorial Party's were both formed. So essentially that was how things happened. I am not sure whether the Territorial Party for the Marianas, Saipan during those days was affiliated with that of the Territorial Party of Guam. However, in the case of the Popular Party, yes we did communicate with Guam back then, however, both Political Parties here and Guam were interested in the Political Unification of the Mariana Islands. Because we come from the same geographic location, and same cultural background, we thought that it would be ideal to be united under one government. However, the Popular Party for the Marianas during those days, their number one goal at that time, for Saipan, our number one priority is to become a part of the United States and we thought that it would be faster for the Americans to understand and to take us to become part of the United States. Let us say that they take us and we unify with Guam, because Guam is already part of the United States. Since we come from the same area, same people and same cultural background, that in itself justifies for our acceptance. That convinced our people to pursue unification with Guam. If I understand it, back then and also for our leaders, that if they accepted the Re-unification with Guam and the Northern Marianas, even

at that time , we will still have to negotiate the conditioned. We will not fall under Guam automatically, we will have to negotiate the conditions on the whether its advantageous or not. Then from there we will decide.

Q. 6: Mr. Guerrero, during the process of such desire by our people in 1969, if I am not mistaken there was a referendum held and such desire or wishes did not go through. From there what do you think was the factor or the reasoned the people of Guam went against the wishes of our people in the Marianas?

A: A....that is right, it was 1969 when Guam held their Plebiscite also, the same year the Northern Marianas had theirs. Whether Guam and the Northern Marianas will be united or not? I don't know whether you remember that we in the Northern Marianas, at least the Popular Party at that time, were very anxious in explaining to the people at that time about the system and the program and about uniting with Guam. Our leaders, educated our people here about the issue of Marianas Re-unification. Later on during our conversation with the leaders of Guam who were in support of unification, they were really confident that the people of Guam will support and accept the idea. So then, they did not work hard in educating their people. So there was not enough votes to pass, however here we approved it. After the result in Guam, our leaders here concluded that since we were not appreciated and therefore it would not be right for us to continue to pressure them. We do not want to force the people. So we took those into things into consideration during the election.

Q. 7: During the time of the Congress of Micronesia, were you a part of the Joint Committee on Political Status Commission?

A: You might remember back then that the Congress of Micronesia started to established and formed, a.... if I am not mistaken in 1967 or 1968. During that time I was not a member of the Congress of Micronesia. Our representative to the Commission on the Micronesian

Political Status for the Congress of Micronesia was a.....if I am not mistaken, was former Senator, Francisco T. Palacios and also, former Senator Olympio T. Borja, I might be wrong with this. However when the election for Congress of Micronesia for the Marianas was held in 1979, I started my term, I was voted in and started serving in 1979. The Marianas Delegation to the Congress of Micronesia were five. Three for the House of Representatives and Two Senators. We were vote, selected together with Sen. Eddie DLG. Pangelinan to represent the Mariana Islands in the Micronesian Political Status Commission.

Q. 8: Mr. Guerrero, back then during the process when the desire to unite with Guam did not materialize, what did the Marianas or what direction, Political Status did you intend to try and negotiate?

A: If we remember that our desire here, or for that matter both parties wanted us to become a part of the American Political Family. To become a part of the United States. In a sense this idea is a blessing in disguise, especially when the people of Guam rejected us. The decision by the people of Guam and that of the Federal Government coincided in 1969, when they offered Micronesia Commonwealth Status, some kind of Commonwealth Status, this is one system where Micronesia Wide will become part of the United States. So then we focus ourselves on that since we were offered....and we accomplished the wishes of our people to become part of the United States, then what you call it....follow the offer made by the United States, to the entire Micronesia Wide. Unfortunately the Congress of Micronesia did not accept, disagreed with that offer, for Commonwealth-wide.

However, the negotiations with the federal had begun, between the U.S. and Micronesia through the Congress of Micronesia Political Status Commission. From there, we as representatives from the Marianas started requesting the United States for.....to seek for Common-

wealth Status. From 1970 until we started negotiating the Covenant in 1972, three-years from the date we started, myself and Eddie Pangelinan, the Marianas Delegation, the Congress of Micronesia and also the District Legislature and the Municipal Councils. We kept informed the representative from the Federal, in the Negotiation of Micronesia and the Congress of Micronesia, that our desire to become part of the Government of the United States. At that time, we did not mentioned that we wanted to be separated, because we were only one. What we were trying to do was to convince them that it is good to study the advantages and the disadvantages of joining the American Political Family. However, if they do not want such political system, as we had mentioned in 1969 our wishes was to go back, then we should respect that. We were not denying them, however, we did not want to be serious, because it was not right.

Q. 9: So from that time on you already started with the intention of asking the United States and the Federal, if I am not mistaken for a separate talk to be given the opportunity to negotiate with the United States?

A: That's right a....our main principal together with Mr. Eddie Pangelinan at the Micronesian Political Status Commission a.....we tried our best to cooperate. We gave cooperation to our other members in that Commission about the steps in politics, in a manner where they will not accept our interest. But then it was very clear that their interest was different, we told them of our decision to support them in their quest, however give us the opportunity to seek for a political status of our choice. I remember Congress of Micronesia being very firm in their Future Political Status Commission negotiating for only one political status. They did not allow for a separate negotiation for each district. They would not even recognized the Marianas to negotiate separately. So on top of that thefederal, the Representative to the United States during these negotiation, did not want to recognize the Marianas to negotiate for

a separate status. So it became very difficult. For two-years time that was our agenda. Then it became very difficult because after two years, finally the federal government realized that it was not right for our people, or any group of people to deprive or deny them of their aspirations and wishes.

Q. 10: So that was the beginning of the Negotiation? When did the negotiation with the United States begin or the Federal, separate talks from the rest of Micronesia?

A: Now it is very interesting, because during, during the negotiation with the Federal, within the Micronesian Political Status Commission, we were trying as much as we can to advance our interest. Every, every negotiation. Back then in Palau in 1972 in the negotiation session with the Micronesian Political Status Commission, we had the opportunity....Eddie and I, had planned to approach the Ambassador for the United States during this negotiation completely outside of the negotiation. Just as a private matter, not secretly. But we just cannot during the negotiation advance the United States. We tossed out and made an agenda the issues affecting the Marianas, but it was not possible. So we then looked for a way to talk to the ambassador only in a very informal that was not far for Micronesia to decide on their Future, however we in the Marianas will be in left field. The United States must come up with their decision. No offense on that. Then in April of 1972 while in Palau, outside the Session, they said okay, we will accept that and will introduce that during the Palau Plenary Session in April 1972. That was when we formally organized ourselves.

Q. 11: Back then when the United States accepted or the Federal agreed for us to negotiate separately, the two political parties in the Marianas, such as the Territorial or the Republican and the Democratic Party, otherwise known as Popular Party, did they both have the same desire?

A: A....a the Popular Party just about had no surprise. Back then majority of the members of the District Legislature, especially here in Saipan, belong to the Popular Party. So it is basically the same both before we leave for the negotiation and even during the negotiation.....for the negotiation and during the negotiation with Micronesia, we communicate with one another on the progress of such negotiation. Then as soon as the United States responded favorably, we immediately informed the District Legislature here and including the Administration about the position of the United States, however very informal. We then planned in advance in case they continue what we were to do, and in a matter of....in May, no in two weeks before they okayed it.....the U.S. accepted our request for separate talks. The District Legislature got together and held a Session, formed and adopted the creation of the Marianas Political Status Commission with (15) members representing both Political Parties, the Carolinian Community, the Women's, and the Business Community. Everyone was well represented. So then we had no problem, after the United States accepted for the two partiesgenerally including the Territorial Party supported the idea.

Q. 12: When the Negotiation started in 1972, how long did it take you to accomplish your work with the United States?

A: The Negotiation was completed in two-years, in February of 1975. So, it took more than two-years to complete the Negotiation. The reasoned the negotiation was kind of smooth was let me back you...let me retract okay, during the negotiation of Micronesia, Eddie and I started searching for a consultant. In fact even before the United States accepted our request for a separate negotiation, as a matter of fact in Washington, the negotiation with Micronesia, I don't know of you remember Mr. Paul Wang. Mr.Wang was the Legal Counsel for the Micronesian Political Status Commission. He invited Micronesians to his house during the

negotiations for cocktail. We then asked him for assistance in finding us a legal expert on the Constitution. He can recommend in case.....and then very informally, he recommended the Wilmer, Cutler and Pickering. The people at the Legislature were not aware of this. This was only preliminary, just in case they expressed their interest in providing assistance to us for the negotiation. They were able to render their expertise to us. We then introduce them following our acceptance to negotiate and to introduce them to the District Legislature and they accepted. That was how they hired the firm of Wilmer, Cutler & Pickering. But the key here was very smooth because we have already focus on what we wanted. It was just a matter of time, the conditions and others. That was one, the other was because our staff were very capable, the legal staff and consultant, both in the area of legal and the economic scene, all were expert. This is why it went smooth and quick. Then on top of that, every session a....after every session we will have public dissemination of information education. We did not have much of a problem and you might remember back then during the....the Covenant was already adopted by the Status Commission.

There was a very hectic educational process. Both sides argued which makes it very hard.

Q. 13: Being one of the negotiators of the Covenant, just about everything that was negotiated in the First Constitutional Convention back in 1976, did you foresee any of the present problems on the Federal Take Over, with regards to Labor and Immigration, and Minimum Wage, from you personally? You did not envision this Federal Take Over of our Labor and Immigration and Minimum Wage happening to the CNMI?

A: No, we did not expect those. We did not expect our leaders, I am not challenging them, but they seriously consider the conditions of the Covenant, our relationship with the Federal Government about the Covenant, which we all know is not a one hundred percent perfect

document and it is difficult to find such a thing and even within families we cannot find everything perfect. However, speaking from experience, there we are sufficient enough to advance ourselves. There are provisions included in the Covenant to improve the Economic advancement for our people. There are also provisions in there relating to Land Matters that will not affect the future generation. It is very unfair for us to make decisions today that will affect our future generation forever, right. Because it is not fair for us to make decisions that will affect them in the future, our future generations will not be able to make changes if they so desire. We did not expect to see these kind of problems happening today. It is very unfortunate and sad because they are happening. There is a way, there is a way to reverse those. However, it is very difficult. The most important part is to try to win back the confidence of the federal. Our credibility is being questioned.

Q. 14: You did not include those sections in our Constitution to make possible the implementation of our government, knowing that the Covenant has already been approved? Now from the deliberations of the Constitutional Convention, can you tell me what were some of the most difficult proposals or provisions for you the delegates from Saipan, Tinian and Rota?

A: First of all, the Constitution should not conflict with the Covenant. Because the Covenant is more supreme than the Constitution. The Constitution was created under the auspices of the Commission of the Covenant. The Covenant provides for a bicameral legislature. The Senate and the House of Representatives. Saipan was not in support of such idea, one because of the cost, it is a little bit over crowded and the process is difficult. We the Negotiators from Saipan were not in favor of the composition, however, Negotiators from Tinian and Rota insisted in coming up with a bicameral legislature. It was their contention and believe that if the legislature is unicameral, then Saipan will always be the majority and Saipan will always

be in control. So that was how we derived at coming up with a bicameral legislature. We did not expect for this kind of problem and that was a major concern, for one house to control the other house. If that is the case and that was what they wanted, then that was very bothersome. The Constitution was very difficult, because we guide ourselves on the Covenant and the Republican form of government. So then there were three branches of government. There were provisions that were not favorable or unnecessary that were included. For example the Indigenous Affairs Office to be separated by ethnicity. The Office should not be in the Constitution, it can be enacted by law, if the legislature so intends. So I don't think there are many problems. They are not emotional but personal issues only. However, they were not fundamental.

Q. 15: So during the drafting of the Constitution, the Covenant sort of helped you right? It kind of dictated how the process is done to draft a Constitution. Now a days there are lots of problems with Tinian and Rota in the upper house. As you have already stated, they worked so hard to make sure their interests in the Covenant are protected. Unlike the legislature where if it were to be a Unicameral Legislature, then Saipan will always be in control. However, if I am not mistaken, I don't know if our brothers and sister in Tinian and Rota will ever agree. Rota and Tinian were afraidthat everything they give will come from the legislature. In this case all of their interest will be given to them. So that's it, otherwise, I still doubt it, because for us the people of Saipan, there is too much of an advantage taken by the people from these two islands. Looking at it from a revenue standpoint, how much are they putting in? If you look back during the Micronesia era, if I am not mistaken, that was one of the main reasons the Marianas pull out, for reasons that a lot of the revenues collected here were sent to the other districts. Now a days, I will not say that we are supporting Tinian and Rota. From my personal experienced

I know we.....you who are presently in control might not know the initial intent of our brothers and sisters from both Tinian and Rota, in pursuing for a Bicameral Legislature.

A: Back during the time of the Congress of Micronesia, yes the one reasoned for having ...lets say two system, but we must understand that during those days, Micronesian era, the entire islands in Micronesia had a total Budget of only Ten Million Dollars a year. Only ten million dollars! On top of that, the ten million dollars was not under the control of the Congress of Micronesia, it was the High Commissioner and the Secretary of Interior. So Congress of Micronesia does not have any authority and disposition on the ten million dollars. In spite of the fact that it was a very minimal amount, if you were to split it up amongst the six-districts. On top of that, the six districts, including the Marianas, were very undeveloped and the demand for improvement and development was tremendous. One district might say that the Marianas is very advanced, in their standard, that might be true. But for our standard, the Marianas was way behind. They have their own standard. So that was how such problem and fortunately, unfortunately for our brothers and sisters in Micronesia, it is our locality right, our location with other commercialized countries that put us in a more advanced status, economically. However, when our Constitutional Government came into effect, our revenues tremendously increased both locally and from the federal government. This is very difficult.....we the local people must workout in getting to understand each other. We must trust and help each other and stop the, I hate to use the word “greediness” however the people are very selfish. However, we seriously look at their needs versus the others, or any place here in Saipan today, regardless of whether under represented or not. It must be recognized and supported. That is where the problem between Saipan, Tinian and Rota. Other than that, even here in Saipan alone, we still have problems. Because those with smaller representation will be left behind in the

distribution of funds, as you will know. So this should not be happening, because it slows the process and the meager amount of money will be split up