

Emilio Hidalgo

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[1:59:2 Beginning]

CALONGE: Colonel Hidalgo, I have here a series of questions regarding the war, the Second World War, but there are preliminary questions as well to provide us, the viewers, or the listeners to your background. So, when and where you born?

HIDALGO: I was born in May, at Tanauan, Batangas on May 28th, 1918.

CALONGE: Can you describe where Tanaunan is in the Philippines, if it is in the Batangas it must be in the southern part of Manila, right?

HIDALGO: Yeah, it is around fifty kilometers from Manila.

CALONGE: How is the climate there? How is the culture there?

HIDALGO: You know that the town is near the south Batangas, you know before it was near the Taal Volcano, but when it erupted, the town was transferred to the border between Tanauan and the Santo Tomas. The most prominent there is... Apolinario Mabini was the brains of the Philippine Revolution under General Aguinaldo. Also President [Jose P.] Laurel originated and was born right there in town in the Batangas.

CALONGE: What line of work were your parents in? What did they do, your parents?

HIDALGO: My parents are clothes vendors; they sell clothes in the bigger peninsula and other places.

CALONGE: What was it like when you were growing up, where did you go to school? What did you do for fun when you were young?

HIDALGO: I was a rather a very, very hard person to deal with because I was a little bit very mischievous. During the rainy days, I swim in the canals and passing through the tunnels over

¹ Honorable Calonge was Consul General of the Philippines in Chicago in 2015

there. Then one day, when I was inside the tunnel I found there was a pipe there and I couldn't go through to the other side. I tried my best and then I was able to exit from where I came from, I told myself maybe something different here, why God made me live, after that. I will always remember that because--

CALONGE: Where did you go to college?

HIDALGO: I went to college at the University of [the Philippines. Not clear]. That was in 1936. After the war, I continued with those studies at the MLK university campus.

CALONGE: For law?

HIDALGO: Law, I am a lawyer, I was retired as a member of the justice for the general service of the Armed Forces of the Philippines.

CALONGE: So, when you were at UP, what degree did you earn in UP? What degree? What was your course in UP?

HIDALGO: I was taking up originally Engineering, but I found out that I could not be admitted to the Philippine military after taking engineering because, you know, my eyesight--

CALONGE: Wasn't very good?

HIDALGO: Became very poor, so I proceeded to Law

CALONGE: How many years did you stay in UP?

HIDALGO: I stayed there four years until I had finished the advanced course in ROTC.

CALONGE: Ah, you were ROTC. At the time when tensions between the United States and Japan were deteriorating, were you aware of the situation at the time?

HIDALGO: Yeah, That's why. I don't have too much money; my parents were not sending much at the time. Instead of continuing my studies, I volunteered to be called up for active duty with the USAFFE [United States Army Forces in the Far East]. To be sure that I'll called off for active duty, I was accompanied by our former Governor Castillo to the headquarters of the Philippine Army and he inquired from his friends if we would be called. They said I would be called to active duty. So, I just waited for the call to active duty and it came on August 28th, 1941, when I was called there, Lieutenant Dahabas [spelling?] and in three days' time, I was inducted as an officer of the USAFFE.

CALONGE: As second lieutenant or a third lieutenant? What was--

HIDALGO: I was a third lieutenant. To make money. [With] officer former ambassador, Russelo [spelling?]?

CALONGE: And were you worried that war would come?

HIDALGO: I knew, but we had to decide whether to join or not, but we decided that we better join and take the side of the United States rather than Japan.

CALONGE: In that connection, what was the role of the United States Armed Forces in the Philippines at the time when you were called to active duty?

HIDALGO: The Philippines were under the United States at that time, we were a colony of the United States and at that time, we had to. There was a call by President Roosevelt, for volunteers to join the military and we took the side of the United States.

CALONGE: How many American regular troops were in the Philippines from what you know at that time?

HIDALGO: At that time the Philippines Scouts was run by the United States and I think they had around six or seven regiments cavalry. But the Philippines, we have around 290,000 members including the constabulary which were all made members of the USAFFE.

CALONGE: United States Armed Forces in the Far East.

HIDALGO: Upon the call of President Roosevelt.

CALONGE: And the Philippine Constabulary and the Philippine Commonwealth Army, were they well-trained? Do you think they were well trained?

HIDALGO: Yeah, they're being trained also by Field Marshall McArthur, graduates of West Point, and Artillery Guard from Fort Sill, Oklahoma.

CALONGE: What kind of equipment did they have. Did you think they had enough equipment just before the war?

HIDALGO: They were all obsolete

CALONGE: Obsolete?

HIDALGO: Obsolete, you know what they gave to overseas? They had the .45 caliber revolvers, as equipment.

CALONGE: Not the pistols.

HIDALGO: Not the pistols.

CALONGE: So, can you say the Philippine Commonwealth forces and Constabulary were not prepared for war? At least equipment wise, were they not prepared for war? At least, equipment wise.

HIDALGO: I don't think so...and even Clark Airfield was bombed by the Japanese at 12:30 hours [UTC, Universal Time Coordinated+8] of December 8th, and a week ago [later] around twelve B-17s of the USAAF had just landed at Monroe, they were brand new, but after the bombing, not one of them came up to challenge the Japanese. You know why, Sir?

CALONGE: Why?

HIDALGO: They didn't have a gallon of gasoline to run the planes.

CALONGE: Well, in your view, what was the relationship between the Filipino troops and the American forces? Did they have smooth relations, or were there bombs on the road?

HIDALGO: You know, the Americans who serve in Bataan, they're usually the... [12:25:0] personal pick of handing the equipment of the armed forces. they are just given all the equipment needed by the Philippine army and they are not designed [as combat] troops, they are not combat.

CALONGE: The Americans?

HIDALGO: There are 16,000 Americans in Bataan, but the Filipinos, we are around 100,000. They are the 21st Division, the 41st Division, the 51st Division, the 61st.

CALONGE: What was the relationship among the troops, the Americans and the Filipinos?

HIDALGO: Very good.

CALONGE: Very good. Did they treat each other well, there was respect?

HIDALGO: They are brave people. Many of them are Jewish. Yes, Jewish.

CALONGE: American soldiers?

HIDALGO: Yes, my battery commander was a Jewish captain, he was very brave. I think he deserves to be decorated, but I never knew what happened to him after Bataan. Everything was lost.

CALONGE: What about the relationship between the regular American army, the regular Philippine army? Was it also smooth? Was it good?

HIDALGO: Eh, It was all right.

CALONGE: Did they not—

HIDALGO: We had our training grounds at Clark Airfield. We were around 800 Filipino officers. And our firing range will be crobali [unsure of word].

CALONGE: Crobali [unsure of word]. And the trainers were Americans?

HIDALGO: Our trainers were graduates from Fort Sill, Oklahoma, the artillery training center of the United States Armed Forces.

CALONGE: So, in your view what kind of preparations for war were being made by Filipino and US forces at that time? If they were not as you said they were not well-equipped, what kind of preparations were being made?

HIDALGO: We were being trained in how to fire and handle this artillery at [15:08:0] at Camp Tao? It's in Punga. That's a part of Clark Field. We were being trained by graduates of the Artillery course in the US and also Philippine graduates from West Point and everything.

CALONGE: Why did you decide to join the ROTC, what led you to that decision? Why did you want to become a reserve officer?

HIDALGO: I want to be qualified as an officer, that is why I joined the advanced course.

CALONGE: In the UP. And what was the program like, what was ROTC program like in UP in your days? Did you handle weapons? Did you-- How many students were involved in the ROTC program during your time?

HIDALGO: We have around 4000 cadets there, I was a battalion commander of the ROTC and my commanding officer there, he is a graduate of Annapolis Naval Academy and the ones handling the Infantry were graduates of West Point. [16:45:0] Kendal Res and Kendal Publites [spelling?] were two graduates of West Point and also graduates of the Philippine Military Academy.

CALONGE: So you have good weapons training while in ROTC? Did you have good training in weapons in ROTC?

HIDALGO: Yeah, we had.

CALONGE: When you graduated from college, where you commissioned immediately after college? Did you have a commission?

HIDALGO: When I graduated from the ROTC, I was immediately handed the commission of third lieutenant because that was the lowest rank available for officers in the Armed Forces of the

Philippines. Unlike the US, the lowest rank is second lieutenant... When the war broke out, we were still third lieutenants and we became only second lieutenants in 1945 because of a directive of President [Manuel] Quezon. We were automatically raised to second lieutenant.

CALONGE: I understand that. In your case did you receive further training; did you receive specialty training after getting commissioned? Did you have a specialized training?

HIDALGO: Yeah, that was the training. After we were sworn in as members of the US Armed Forces, and lieutenants, September 1st, we were immediately boarded -- a group of trains going to Parpin [spelling?] around Por Chochis [spelling?]. The battalion was brought over there to Clark Field to train and...to handle the guns.

CALONGE: How many men did you have under your command, as an officer?

HIDALGO: As a battery commander of the Headquarters battery of the 2nd [unclear] Battalion of the 51st Division, I have around a hundred and twenty men.

CALONGE: Were there problems about language among the troops? Did you all speak English, or did you speak a Tagalog or--? I'm sure the soldiers came from all over the country, maybe?

HIDALGO: The Philippines is divided into eleven military districts; each district has a reserve force of around one division each, ready. And just like they train people, who can be called to active duty at any time, just like the ready reserves.

CALONGE: When you dealt with your troops, what language did you use? English, everybody spoke English?

HIDALGO: No, we used the Filipino language, but the common language is English

CALONGE: And there was no language problem?

HIDALGO: No, no problem.

CALONGE: What kind of problems or challenges did you have in leading troops in combat? Did you lead troops in combat in Bataan?

HIDALGO: Yeah, In Bataan I was given sixty soldiers to patrol the back areas of the divisions. I would go out about two days for every foot patrol because there are reports that the Japanese have landed paratroopers, there in Bataan, but we could not find any. When I was captured later on, I was wondering why they knew every trail in Bataan.

CALONGE: The Japanese knew?

HIDALGO: Yeah, They knew it!

CALONGE: Wow. Maybe they had good maps. There were people ahead of them?

HIDALGO: The intelligence was very superior. Many of them even married locals, but I was surprised that that some of the Japanese [living in the Philippines], he was fighting for the Japanese independence.

CALONGE: So, where were you exactly on December 7th, 1941, and how did you hear about the Japanese attack on the American Pacific fleet at Pearl Harbor? Where were you around that moment?

HIDALGO: Yeah. Pearl Harbor was bombed on December 7th and December 7th is December 8th in the Philippines.

CALONGE: Where were you at that time?

HIDALGO: At that time I was eating my lunch with Lieutenant Laurel, he was my commanding officer, and we were expecting to be attacked because we knew as early as 3 o'clock in the morning when we were on the way to our camp that Pearl Harbor was being bombed already. To my surprise, we were not even dispersed!

CALONGE: So, where were you around that time.

HIDALGO: We were eating there.

CALONGE: What camp is that? Where is that? Where is that camp?

HIDALGO: That is at Camp Tao.

CALONGE: Camp Tao.

HIDALGO: And you know, they-- sixty heavy bombers of the Japanese bombed Clark Airfield at around 12:30 hours of December 8th, and all the planes were destroyed. None were able to meet the enemy. Then, even afterwards, we had not, we were not even dispersed. I don't know why.

CALONGE: Once the attack was made, what was your reaction to the attack, how did you feel about it?

HIDALGO: We could not do anything because we were not even ordered to be dispersed to meet the enemy right there in the places where they landed over the Philippines and were enveloping us.

CALONGE: There was only one day between the attack on Pearl Harbor and initial stages of the Japanese invasion of the Philippines. Can you describe that day and your first encounter with the Japanese forces?

HIDALGO: The Philippines was bombed on December 8th and the Japanese landed around December 17th or 18th at Lingayen [Gulf] they landed also at Tuguegarao they landed at Atimonen, and Sayan, and Tayabas [Bay], no casualties. They never landed there in the south of Batangas, Batangas Cavite, like that. They were unopposed. Later on, within two or three days they were met by the cavalry of the United States Philippine scouts and you know what happened? The Philippine scouts were almost eliminated because they could not-- What could they do fighting light tanks? In Bataan, you will see cavalry units with only five or six soldiers, everybody has been killed.

CALONGE: So horses, against tanks? There were in horses and they were fighting tanks, light tanks and--?

HIDALGO: Yeah, what could they do against light tanks using cavalry? Oh, I tell you it was a terrible thing to see people like that.

CALONGE: Yeah. When you were assigned in Bataan, did you have many engagements against the Japanese?

HIDALGO: Yeah, you know when they reached first Manila on December 26th, all roads leading to Bataan had already been fallen into the hands of the enemy. I could not reach Bataan except only to cross Manila Bay. I had to beg the to one of the chief persons of the US Navy detachment in charge of Manila to lend me a street boat to go to Corregidor and I was able to reach Corregidor at daybreak of New Year's Day of 1942 and we were attacked immediately upon the...President [Manuel] Quezon [soldier as well as president of the Commonwealth of the Philippines from 1935 to 1944] was there, Rommel was there. We had to run to the Malinta Tunnels. Then later on I had to rejoin my unit there in Bataan and I was able to reach them on January 5th. And you know the US, they started hostilities started as early as January 10th. And we were guarding this Pilar-Bagac Road that is a road that runs from Bataan, Pilar going to Mount Samat then up to Bacarra up to the other side, northwest of the peninsula, and that is the surprise road where I had the fortune, I had made the story of that. It was the main target. It took us twenty-five days fighting the enemy there and they were not able to disperse us or to go through us. We fought them.

CALONGE: Yeah. In these combat operations what was your major role? What was your role? You commanded the troops? Or you-- What did you do?

HIDALGO: No, I was in charge of a battery which has about four cannons. I was in charge of two cannons. The other was another officer, Lieutenant-Albise [spelling?]----- from [29:15:0-unclear] And we were supervising to see what the men were doing.

CALONGE: So were you delivering artillery fire?

HIDALGO: Yeah, we could fire at the enemy during that twenty-five days about 1200 rounds of ammunition every day.

CALONGE: Wow So, 155 mm?

HIDALGO: No, they were wondering why we didn't have that. We had the 75 mm. But, we also had this one 155 of four guns. You know, the problem it being that the guns being destroyed at one time. So, they divided the four into two units. One is under this General Balgas and other was under the General Reyadna [spelling?] and then they changed places about every [30:25:0-unclear] to avoid being seen by the enemy.

CALONGE: What enemy weapons, what Japanese weapons were the most dangerous to your unit?

HIDALGO: Oh, the most dangerous, I think, is the low-flying planes, they drop as low as five feet, ten feet, they will be dropping bombs all around.

CALONGE: At that height you going to shoot them down?

HIDALGO: I don't know but--

CALONGE: You did have anti-air artillery?

HIDALGO: We were too shocked to fire, we had nothing to do, but dive to our fox holes.

CALONGE: What kind of terrain was advantageous to your mission? What kind of terrain was advantageous to your mission?

HIDALGO: You know Bataan was prepared by General MacArthur to be the last place where he would like to meet the enemy. And you know Bataan is a peninsula wherein at the one side was a tall mountain, we called Mount Natib and there was also Mount Samat and the arable land which can be cultivated is already around five or six kilometers between the sea.

CALONGE: All mountains?

HIDALGO: They were all hills, very steep hills and that is where we were located, and we have the advantage of being on top.

CALONGE: And when was the enemy most vulnerable to you? Did they come out in the open en masse?

HIDALGO: You know, as early as January 9 [December 9?], we had observed a [32:54:0] long horn buoy [not sure of words] entering Bataan. You know, I think they knew that the targets already. You know, they stopped right there, they didn't pull up this Pilar-Bagac Road which is a very strategic position because along this road were posted all equipment, all supplies, all food, and everything we need, all over the whole peninsula and they knew it. They put that position against us for twenty-five days, but they were not able to get through because of the actions of our artillerymen. I put up a very nice defense which they called it TOT, we called it the time on target, wherein batteries coming from different places and different ranges, they could be able to drop their shells [not sure?] all at the same time, so there could be a very nice welcome for the enemy. [Laughter]

CALONGE: When did you receive orders to retreat to the Bataan Peninsula? [repeats question].

HIDALGO: As early as December 10th, we were meeting the enemy there in Lucena. Then the instruction is always to head towards Bataan and let the enemy follow and they really followed. That was the plan of General MacArthur.

CALONGE: What did MacArthur's overall strategy of successive defensive lines mean for your unit? What was your tasking under that withdrawal? Did you have to establish defensive positions every now and then?

HIDALGO: No, we had to be together to put up the big defenses against the enemy because the concentration will be there, in Bataan. If you were able to reach this place, you'll be deployed in defensive positions all over the province, but those who were not able to come were instructed to join the guerrillas.

CALONGE: Okay. Were you able to bring your heavy equipment or did you have to leave some behind?

HIDALGO: I was surprised because they have all the Filipino canons and some of the canons even came from the ROTC. They brought them already, and they are leaving us to fight outside the Bataan and then we had to regroup and go there, to Bataan and rejoin them.

CALONGE: So, they went ahead? When did you get to the Bataan peninsula and when you got to Bataan, what was your assignment there?

HIDALGO: I was in charge of to protect the back area of the divisions because there were reports that Japanese parachutists have dropped above the place.

CALONGE: So, when exactly did you reach Bataan? When?

HIDALGO: I reached Bataan January 3rd.

CALONGE: Did you have a good resupply in Bataan, where you resupplied there regularly? Did you have good supply? Food?

HIDALGO: Oh, to tell you...We were already very short of supplies when we reached Bataan. We only ate once a day and that was only in the morning. And do you know what you ate? Rice porridge with a little salmon and a little sardine. Once a day only for three months.

CALONGE: While in Bataan, were you able to go to Corregidor? As you said earlier you say you went to Corregidor, right?

HIDALGO: I went to Corregidor then you had to cross the bay again to Cabcaben.

CALONGE: Cabcaben. That's from Bataan. How did you get there? Did you get there by boat?

HIDALGO: By boat, by boat.

CALONGE: Was it dangerous to go there?

HIDALGO: You know Bataan was surrounded by mines; it was very dangerous.

CALONGE: To go to Corregidor is dangerous?

HIDALGO: Even to go to Corregidor is to go around to go to Bataan -- is dangerous

CALONGE: Can you describe Corregidor and its importance to the defense of the Philippines or Manila?

HIDALGO: Corregidor was formerly a custom's organization office of the Spaniards before, when they were once ruling the Philippines. And Corregidor is the one guarding the entrance to Manila. In between Corregidor and Cavite there are already a few islands, small islands which they call the Caraballo Island. They had mounted the 16 inch cannons and at Corregidor they have big cannons that's why the enemy would not like to pass through the waters going to Manila. They had to pass the back lands.

CALONGE: Was the Island's defenses organized? Was it an organized defense?

HIDALGO: Yeah, I was surprised when I...the Balintang Channel. Everything was...They had buildings built inside the mountains, everything.

CALONGE: Approximately how many troops were in Corregidor? How many soldiers or troops were in Corregidor?

HIDALGO: I think they had around nine thousand.

CALONGE: Nine thousand. Wow. All Americans?

HIDALGO: Many were Americans.

CALONGE: So, you went to Corregidor and then you came back to Bataan, right?

HIDALGO: Yeah.

CALONGE: So where your positions when you came back? The same division positions or did you move while coming back from Corregidor to Bataan? Did you have to move within the Division...?

HIDALGO: Well, we had certain areas assigned to us and we coordinate to our right with the 41st Division and to our left is the 21st Division in case we need support from the ordered divisions, we just radioed to them or called them with the telephone to render us support.

CALONGE: Was there a main Japanese attack that you saw? A big Japanese attack that played before your eyes?

HIDALGO: Yeah, I tell you the biggest battle that happened there is the one that happened at the Pilar-Bagac road. It lasted from January 10th to February 3rd. Thirty-five days, Thirty-five continuous days and nights. Bombing, shelling by artillery and mortars. Every day, every night.

CALONGE: How did it feel to be in such a situation? How do you describe it? Were you fearful of your life?

HIDALGO: We never gave ground to them and we fought them as best as we can and they were not able to get through, except on the 21st of January. We were pushed back around jTokaros Dundhahill [43:11:0, not sure of name of place?] but we still held our positions and they were not able to pass through us.

CALONGE: From January until April, Bataan was in a state of siege, right?

HIDALGO: Yes.

CALONGE: What were the conditions for you and your men during that time? You said there was a shortages of food, but what about other necessities? like water, medicine, ammunition? Was everything in short supply during that time?

HIDALGO: We had plenty of ammunition, but we lacked quinine, we lacked medicine for... What do you call it? We lacked medicine—

CALONGE: Quinine is for malaria, right?

HIDALGO: Yes, malaria and dysentery. We cannot have any medicine at that time. Many of our troops went in between the frontlines just to buy there, selling the medicine.

CALONGE: To civilians?

HIDALGO: Yeah, and the Americans, they usually go to Corregidor they usually have it, but in limited quantities only.

CALONGE: In all your experience in Bataan what is one thing you cannot forget in your memory? What is something that stands out and will always be with you?

HIDALGO: One thing I would like people to remember is that the memorial to the soldiers of Bataan was erected at Balanga which was the actual place where the surrender of Bataan took place and only after seventy-three years, this year, the Philippine government celebrated the fall of Bataan in the town of Pilar up to the Mount Samat. They never knew what happened there during that time. During the final days before Bataan surrendered, they never knew what really happened. During I describe to you, because on March 30th, sixty heavy bombers flew all over Bataan and did not drop a bomb, they did not fire any shot. They just went around three times and then left. Then the next day, March 31st, two groups of sixty heavy bombers, they circled the province three times and they did not drop any bombs. We knew that would be the end of everything. I was so—so afraid, maybe so afraid that I knelt with my knees on the ground and then I whispered a silent prayer to the good Lord that if I should ever die on the following day, I would ask the Lord, 'Let me die as a soldier and not as a coward.'

CALONGE: Later were you captured?

HIDALGO: I was captured on April 7th, by a group of young boys around twenty or twenty-years, only, but they had pistols, they had small swords.

CALONGE: Did they treat you well, the soldiers, the Japanese soldiers?

HIDALGO: All right.

CALONGE: Did they feed you?

HIDALGO: They are not the bloodthirsty people, but you know they become terrible during the occupation and even after the surrender because during the surrender - if the civilians were offering you food or medicine and everything, and you accept it, they'll be running after the civilians and bayonet them.

CALONGE: When you were captured were any of your men also captured? Your men? What happened to them?

HIDALGO: Yeah, I was captured in...but I escaped on the night April 9, I brought with me twelve, we and we were thirteen and we were able to escape into Manila.

CALONGE: So, what happened to the rest of your men, did some probably remained prisoners?

HIDALGO: Yeah, they became prisoners.

CALONGE: You wrote in your questionnaire that you witnessed [Major] General [Edward] King's [Jr] surrender of the garrison of Bataan to the Japanese. How did you witness the event, the surrender event? How did you witness it?

CALONGE: On April 7th, I was very -- going to breakfast. They fired the artillery and mortars against us. We had to seek shelter in a foxhole and we could not get out of the foxhole as early as nine o'clock in the morning up until four in the afternoon because of the continuous firing, but when I heard something happening outside, I went out. I was met by two Japanese soldiers with fixed bayonets pointed at my heart. I guess...surrendered.

CALONGE: But you witness General King surrender, right?

HIDALGO: Yeah.

CALONGE: What you witness General King surrender. How did you witness that? Were you near him, were you around him?

HIDALGO: I was tied with my friend, Lieutenant Peres Arasabire [51:04:0], unsure of spelling tied [not sure of word] nearby a fire hydrant. We were actually three or four kilometers away from the negotiators, General King and General Homma, very close, very close.

CALONGE: But, you witnessed the surrender ceremony?

HIDALGO: Yeah, Not only the negotiation, but the actual surrender.

CALONGE: You saw it?

HIDALGO: Yeah.

CALONGE: How did you feel about it? What did you think would happen to you after the surrender – to you and your men?

HIDALGO: You know, the next day there will be a death march. I slept in one of the rooms of that schoolhouse and I helped make a hole for our latrine inside for the night. Then the next

morning I did not join the death march because I did not know where we were going. Then later, when I knew we were going to Papas. I joined the death march at six o'clock in the afternoon. And we proceeded towards the town of Balanga. But, upon reaching Balanga, I was so tired and hungry because I had not eaten for around three or four days. I sit down and Gulbenas the born Gulbenas ??? Airirufi [52:56:0-unclear phrase] and when my guard saw it, he kicked me but yet, then and I decided to escape and I separated with the enlisted men.

CALONGE: How long were you in the march? How long did the march take for you? And how many men were killed or died from disease and starvation?

HIDALGO: Lots of people had died during the...encounter in January. We had a group of around three people always preaching the Bible every afternoon or evening and when we were attacked by three or four planes. One bomb went right inside the foxhole and everybody died. Many died.

CALONGE: But during the march, the death march, how long did the march last?

HIDALGO: It will take around two or three days from Bataan to San Fernando and then to Capas.

CALONGE: So for the entire march, how many were killed? Do you have an idea of how many were killed or how many died during the duration of the march.

HIDALGO: I have witnessed lots of people lying on the side of the road and already worms are coming outside of the stomach. Maybe they were prisoners. I think than no less than five people.

CALONGE: How did you manage to escape from the march? And how did you decide to escape and how did you do it?

HIDALGO: [55:30:0] You know, I made [unclear word ???] and wanted to ask to the Japanese [unclear?] they never thought we were intending to escape. I thought, 'You go and you go' and then we are left on the side. Then after the group has left, I brought my men towards Manila Bay, but we could not cross the mouth of the river because on the other side were a group of around one-hundred Japanese soldiers who were drinking and celebrating their victory, so we had to come back and wait until the morning and we had to follow the provincial road going to Lubao and San Fernando.

CALONGE: That's how you escaped. What made you decide to escape? To risk your life from the Japanese as you were getting away?

HIDALGO: I felt so angry when I was kicked that I decided that whether it be cost me my life or not I had to escape because of the hitting. They were going to kill me already. I could not go on because I was already terribly sick with malaria and dysentery. Blood was coming out from my bowels.

CALONGE: After you escaped, where did you go? You said you went to Manila?

HIDALGO: No, we followed the Pampangary Trail from Lubao and we rented a boat going to Hagonoy up the river. Then upon reaching Hagonoy, we took a charter paid bus going to Baleros [spelling], then to Savindan [spelling], and then to Manila. And upon reaching Manila, I brought my companions to [58:00:0] Tiffin Queen [not sure of name?] and they give them a good meal at the restaurant.

CALONGE: Did anyone take care of you when you reached Manila?

HIDALGO: Some friends and nobody will care about us and we have to go on our own.

CALONGE: So, no civilians took care of you?

HIDALGO: No.

CALONGE: So, nobody put themselves at risk to help you?

HIDALGO: No.

CALONGE: So, did you ever go into hiding after that time? You went to hiding.

HIDALGO: No, when my mother knew I was already in Manila, she sent word to my relatives that I was staying with by relatives [so that] to [avoid] prison. My mother sent word as she would like me to go home to Batangas. But, my cousin, "I would not bring you to Batangas unless you shave your mustache." I would not, because I thought, 'No'. My promise is that I will only shave it when we go on a victory march after the war. I had to shave it and it brought me and I must go to Batangas and my mother upon reaching Batangas brought me to a barrio far away, so that nobody could see it.

CALONGE: So, you were in hiding?

HIDALGO: I was in hiding.

CALONGE: Were there times when you felt you might be found by the Japanese and that they will torture you or capture you?

HIDALGO: No, as early as December 1942, I was in charge of the PQOG in our guerrilla unit. I summoned all the bad guys over there. They had to leave the place if they have to do their foolishness over there, their thievery. Many of them complied my request

CALONGE: So, you joined the guerillas?

HIDALGO: Yeah.

CALONGE: What was the name of the outfit that you joined? What was the name of the guerilla--?

HIDALGO: The PQOG [President Quezon's Own Guerrilla] under General [Vincente] Umali.

CALONGE: Philippine President Quezon's own guerillas. Did you fear being discovered by the occupation forces by the Japanese?

HIDALGO: And June of the next year, that was 193, there was a seminar of the released prisoners of war. The purpose, I was sent there by my PQOG officer to verify what was the purpose of that seminar. It appears that these Japanese were pleading to the released prisoners not to join the guerillas and I attended the seminar, when I was a released, an escaped prisoner, and I would never to do that again. I was quite lucky that not one of them squealed on me and I was also lucky because the Makapili [Makabayang Katipunan ng mga Pilipino, Patriotic Association of Filipino, a militant group which supported Japan] people there, some of them are my relatives also and nobody but nobody... I could do the tour of the Batangas with a .45 in my waist and nobody would even venture to talk to me.

CALONGE: Did you know anybody who was found out by the Japanese to be a guerilla? Did you know anybody who was discovered by the Japanese to be a guerilla?

HIDALGO: I know some.

CALONGE: Knew some. What happened to them?

HIDALGO: They were liquidated. They [unclear].

CALONGE: They were killed?

HIDALGO: Yeah.

CALONGE: How did you deal with the stress of being hunted or in danger of being found out?

HIDALGO: [1:03:30] Oh, we were confined in a barrio in Batangas. I...The bad people very controlled by us over there so we'll have the very good...everybody is cooperating.

CALONGE: So, when exactly did you join the President Quezon's Own Guerillas?

HIDALGO: It was in December of 1942.

CALONGE: Where was the headquarters of that unit?

HIDALGO: The headquarters was in Bali-au-bon [spelling] around the Batangas and the commanding general was General Belsenia [spelling]

CALONGE: Balsenia. What kind of resources did you have? Did you have an intelligence network for example? Did you have armories? Weapons did you have? What kind of logistics did you have?

HIDALGO: We had just only short firearms, we didn't have any rifles and then these firearms came from private individuals which we asked them to lend it to us. We had nothing to use except we used to ask the civilians, they give it to us. I also was very lucky in dealing with civilians because as the individual in charge of the farm of my father-in-law, he allowed me to distribute the harvest as I desired and I could give that to everybody who needs it.

CALONGE: So, what kind of operations did you undertake as a unit? What type of operations did you have?

HIDALGO: Most of them were Intelligence because we don't have the...But, I tell you one thing happened in 1944, two trucks were machine-gunned by pilots of the US Air Force and they both run inside the houses and then they set-up a machine-gun by at the side of the street, but I watched already very anxious and I told my men, "All right, prepare, we are going to get that." And we were marching along the side of the street...and we drawn our pistols, but upon reaching the place, I found that the gun has been destroyed, attacked by the American pilots. So, we had to abort the operation. We were quite lucky that the Japanese joined the other group. If they had been there, they might/would have killed us and everything.

CALONGE: So, what was the morale of the guerrillas?

HIDALGO: Very high.

CALONGE: Did you have radios to send information to MacArthur in Australia?

HIDALGO: No, we don't have that equipment.

CALONGE: Were you associated with the Allied Intelligence Bureau, the AIB, did you provide?

HIDALGO: No, we were only under the PQOG.

CALONGE: What kind of background did most of the guerrilla soldiers have? Were they former USAFFE troops? Or were they civilians?

HIDALGO: Many were USAFFE, many Filipino scouts, but many of the...just willing [unclear]...

CALONGE: So, even civilians?

HIDALGO: Yeah.

CALONGE: So, was the PQOG eventually recognized or was everybody recognized as a guerrilla?

HIDALGO: Many.

CALONGE: But not all?

HIDALGO: Not all.

CALONGE: Did you ever have contact with Allied forces operating in the Pacific? Did you even have any connections with them?

HIDALGO: No, no.

CALONGE: No radio contact you said. Do you think the guerilla forces were effective in countering or hindering Japanese operations?

HIDALGO: But they lacked equipment - they could not attack because we don't have the means to overpower the enemy.

CALONGE: So, for example, you never had ambushes against Japanese convoys?

HIDALGO: No, we did not do that because our search parties could not do anything against rifles - that would be suicidal.

CALONGE: But as the liberation was approaching, as the date of liberation was approaching in 1944, '45, did you intensify guerrilla operations?

HIDALGO: Yeah, yeah. We were able to, Our group under, maybe you remember the mayor of Talisay, Batangas, Commander Laurel, he was the head of the guerrilla unit over there. He invited me to join him because of reports that Japanese people are there in the islands...I joined him, while we were waiting below the [1:10:42:0-unclear] line, a grenade was thrown against us, but it exploded upstairs, and then after that when we rounded the island, we found they were swimming towards the Zipah [spelling], we shot them. All these poor Japanese, I killed one.

CALONGE: That is one of the operations that you undertook. Were there many operations that you undertook or not very many?

HIDALGO: Yeah, when the Americans landed at Tabatie [spelling]. They went direct to Manila and the other one went to Batangas and one group composed of around twenty-three men from our unit, they were ambushed and not one of them got out alive.

CALONGE: The Japanese ambushed them?

HIDALGO: Yeah.

CALONGE: When did the war end for you and your men? What exactly was the date when it ended for you?

HIDALGO: When I reported to the Philippines Army, I volunteered for overseas duty and the possible invasion of Japan. I was sent to the USIFIC Pacific [1:12:29:5-unclear] in Northern Luzon that is one of the premier guerrilla organizations for additional training.

CALONGE: So, at that time the war was over for you in the Philippines?

HIDALGO: But we had ground training, we had volunteering, and we were going to...

CALONGE: Japan?

HIDALGO: Japan. But the Japanese surrendered on August 15th and soon they surrendered to MacArthur. And the war ended on August 15th, but you know, a group of Japanese soldiers under Yamashita would not surrender. They stayed right there in the Monte province. About September 15th, of 1945, a group of guerrillas under [1:13:40:0-unclear] the Lieutenant Narcisi [spelling?] broke through the [unclear] lines and compelled them to surrender.

CALONGE: After three years of fighting, how did it feel to be out of danger anymore?

HIDALGO: It is very nice, but knowing what they have gone through, I never... It is very nice to be at peace, but when later on we learned that the United States had passed the Recession Act, [which states that service with the Philippine Commonwealth Army in World War II does not count as US military service.] They do not want to recognize our services. We felt betrayed for having served in Bataan and Corregidor. And even up to now, they have not removed us from the [unclear, 1:14:48:0] of the land.

CALONGE: What were you doing and where were you when the atomic bombs were dropped on Japan. Where were you and what were you doing around that time?

HIDALGO: I was still with the guerrillas.

CALONGE: So during the Japanese surrender did you have occasion to celebrate, did your troops celebrate, did you sing songs, maybe? Were you joyful about the event?

HIDALGO: Yeah, we were happy, very happy.

CALONGE: Is there an experience that you had during your time in uniform that you feel unforgettable about? Was there something that you can tell the next generation that you fought for the country, you fought for liberty? Is that something that your service exemplifies through citizenship? Can you tell that to the next generation of Filipinos or Filipino-Americans?

HIDALGO: I think nothing is better than these Americans, not like any other nationality, like the Russians, like the Chinese. I would prefer the US anytime.

CALONGE: What is your opinion of the enemy, of the Japanese, during the war and has that opinion changed after the war?

HIDALGO: You know, a lot of people have been marred by the war, even civilians. I had cousins who never returned. They were killed right away. Even women were killed by the Japanese. I know a lot of people.

CALONGE: So has your opinion changed about them, about the Japanese?

HIDALGO: Yeah, but I think it will be a long time before they will be accepted back to the Philippines.

CALONGE: Were you ever wounded in action?

HIDALGO: That was only at the [unclear] when I was bombed. blood came out of my ears. Even up to now, when the weather is damp like this, my hearing is very hard

CALONGE: Were you treated for that condition?

HIDALGO: Yeah, now it is a little bit better, but it remains there.

CALONGE: Did you receive any medals or service awards?

HIDALGO: I was given the American service medal, the Philippine service medal, and also the MacArthur medal, and a distinguished service, bunch with two oak clusters, just for people who served in Bataan.

CALONGE: So after the war, what did you do, after the war, immediately after the war?

HIDALGO: After the war, I continued my lawyer studies. And then changed my...[unclear] service and went to--

CALONGE: to JAGs. [Judge Advocate General's] Corps

HIDALGO: JAGs.

CALONGE: I understand you worked with the anti-smuggling actions?

HIDALGO: Yeah, I worked sixteen years under President Marcos. I was the director in Tacloban and then Subic.

CALONGE: What was being smuggled at that time?

HIDALGO: Oh many of them were smuggling textiles, cigarettes, mostly cigarettes.

CALONGE: Were you able to catch many smugglers?

HIDALGO: Yeah, everything, to evade taxes.

CALONGE: Were you able to catch many smugglers?

HIDALGO: Yeah.

CALONGE: Do you feel your military service prepared you for civilian life?

HIDALGO: What was that?

CALONGE: Do you feel your military service prepared you for civilian life?

HIDALGO: I think so.

CALONGE: Are you a member of any veterans' organizations? I think you belong to American Legion?

HIDALGO: I was a former commander of the Post 509 of the American Legion for three consecutive years.

CALONGE: That's in Chicago?

HIDALGO: Yeah.

CALONGE: Okay. So, is becoming a member of the American Legion and Veterans of Foreign Wars very important to you?

HIDALGO: I was also... we did some support in everything we need.

CALONGE: But I assume that becoming a member of the American Legion and the Veterans of Foreign Wars is very important to you?

HIDALGO: Yeah.

CALONGE: Part and parcel of your life. My last question is there anything else you would like to share or anything else you want to, you know, give to our listeners that I wasn't able to ask you?

HIDALGO: I think the public should know that President Reagan was a former veteran. He was shot down in a dogfight with Japanese soldiers over the [1:21:18:0] Pitin Sibonga [spelling]. He fell into the forest there and he was picked up by a friend of mine, SGT Francisco Eslit and he picked up Reagan and hid him far away from the place where the plane fell. Then when Reagan became President in 1980 he sent somebody to the Pitin [spelling] to be looking for this fellow who helped him and when he was found there, he was brought to California without a ticket without a visa or everything, and a plane was waiting for him right there in California. And he was flown direct to Washington and, you know, Reagan is a very good fellow. He meet him especially at the Reagan Foundation in California and I think he get \$1,500 and aside from that he got seventeen acres of the Reagan farm there, in California.

CALONGE: Well, okay.

HIDALGO: There are people who ought to be decorated, also, but I could not find anybody to help me in making the recommendation, like Colonel Valdez, you know of Colonel Valdez from, the former Congress member Valdez, Simeon Valdez.

CALONGE: Yeah, I heard of him.

HIDALGO: Congressman Valdez, during the guerrilla he was able to reach no less than eighty submarines from the US Navy that brought firearms and supplies to the guerillas in Northern Luzon and he ought to be decorated. Also General Narcisi [spelling] because he was the one who broke through the lines of the Japanese there in [1:24:23:0] Caran [spelling]. I was there because I was about to go and he did a lot. And my companions also. It is not for me, I don't care. There were people who fought in the Dividal banachron [1:24:47-unclear] who ought to be decorated, I'm sure. We had these two lieutenants and one sergeant. They are still alive and they ought to be decorated as they [1:25:10:0-1:26:00:0 very unclear]...I don't want to emphasize that because I want good relations between Americans and Filipinos. [talk in Tagalog?].

CALONGE: [1:26:00:0] That was all my questions. Thank you very much.

[end of Interview-1:26:04:0]