

Duty to Country

Filipino Veterans Recognition and Education Project

Interview transcript: Celestino Almeda

Please Note: Due to a machine-automated transcription process, there are significant errors. The times noted are taken from the unedited audio files and do not match the edited videos.

Celestino Almeda [00:00:05] Usually you when you buy food item from a Chinese restaurant, you are given a bunch of candies or cloths with that inside one slips of paper inside a tray. It changed. My body may have been gone with the wind, but my soul remains in your heart. And mine ensure that its legacy, whether I leave a legacy for the younger generations, it's up to you if you can share. My name is Celestino Almeda, a World War Two veteran who was born in Binan Laguna now in the year 1917. We are abroad by brothers whose names are on your border, Pablo history and you know, in the 1925.

Celestino Almeda [00:01:29] My father didn't know that a piece of sugar land in communicability was used as a pawn for a loan from Ginzo. Dangi, a wealthy person in Binan Laguna. Having lost, the sugarcane plantation in Gabon that my father decided to emigrate to Manila. And we landed at Bloviated Street. And there I started my schooling at the elementary school. I attended my schooling in a public school. I attended my best grade and savage grade at the elementary school and my second and third grade at Washington Elementary School. After graduating elementary, I enrolled at the school. The percentage is studying much easier after four years. In 1936, there was a law that all 18 year olds will be trained as reserves. That is a culmination of an agreement between General Douglas MacArthur and President Manuel Quezon. And as a result of the time that I was raised in the law. Because I don't want to go to gun training, I stayed for a year in Laguna after that in 1937, my partner's going to open up a two year graduate study and teachers curriculum and art and training. And we did is a reserve officer training Corps ROTC. So my attendance with the ROTC extended from attending the military training after everything that I know, again, employment with the public schools of the Philippines at. Industrial arts in several schools and finally ending teaching in a relatively high school in December eight, December eight, 1941, the word broke out in the Philippines. And so I received a special order calling me to active duty because having graduated and ROTC, I was assigned with the Anti-Sabotage Regiment, headquartered at an elementary school on the Street. From there, I said, and my duty is to train recruits and they are marching, she is scouting and patrolling and so on, we just enough time. The Japanese spotted us doing some patrolling and scouting.

Celestino Almeda [00:05:38] And that night we were transferred to another school within Manila that we might be bombed. So we don't want to go down that. General Allen just. And that. We are waiting for orders where we will be assigned because the Japanese entered Manila demanding the police department went on absent without leave and were assigned, our unit was converted into the Metropolitan Police because there are no police officers to keep peace and order in Manila because Manila was declared an open city. And one time we were told to gather in garden, just print money. The city hall, all the brilliance of the government were lined up against the big wall and then a Japanese general. But all

the employees and then he said there are too many employees, the Japanese government cannot pay them all. So we will have to cut that in half. And after that, were just friends and had to go home and that was a special order disbanding our unit, and so I went home, I gathered all my belongings. And my great aunt, my Labor Party, my fault, I placed it in a garden filled with oil that would survive, it's a midget in a shoe in to hide my arms. After that, I went inside my living with some of my friends and my cousin all over the avenue, that the Japanese might arrest us because they had in the list our names one time we receive an order to report to our new high school to get a test so that it'll be allowed at the constabulary. I went to high school and took the test and the test it so issued and I may fail it. I failed the test so I would not be recruited as a constabulary officer. And the rest of my companions that were given sidearms and uniform, but instead of staying in their post, they ride, they rode in a boat and then to Bataan after that. I don't know what happened. So I stayed in Manila and I joined a guerrilla army. I was recruited by a major Ramon Edmen and Echo officer of mine at the anti sabotage regiment I was assigned a certain area from I got to go straight to the man at Avenue told me our according to my training as a member of the guerrilla army. I couldn't say very much about my activity as a guerrilla, but I tried my best to gather information, so I sought unemployment at Becoco Granary the equivalent of Ludic because I knew that that office maintains the supply of rice and corn.

Celestino Almeda [00:10:42] So I wouldn't know how the Japanese army will get out there and go into the population and not just happen. Well, I joined the guerrilla army. I didn't really know who our commanding officer is, but I know Major Etchem was the one who recruited me. There's nothing much that I know I knew it only after eight mile bike lane where we were given some injured at a Libyan army officer already. I know that our unit is headed by Major General Edwin Ramzy. To get some information, I tried to check employment have been passed by CEGEP at the Philippines School of Arts and trades, I tried to get employment through a friend at the famed Atlantic and Pacific Company as a machinist at the Atlantic Corp and Pacific Company. There is not much army, but there is nothing that is being produced. Once I was assigned to train a long ship about 20 meters long to be used for a dam for irrigation project, and then I was trained to make piston rings, a 12 inch in diameter, supposed to be used for a piston in a big diesel engine. But I did not materialized.

Celestino Almeda [00:13:05] After two months, I left the job because I can see some other atrocities committed by the Japanese. Imagine your lunchbox and lid and you when you go inside because they cannot open your lunchbox. They put through it some charge or some point. Need to find out if there are something inside. Add more important events like pocketing a tool bit. You're in the job. They're tied, tied to a post with ants around not having enough budget to see that I left my job at that is when I get another job at Granary Becoco because of a similar company as Narrick, which distributes rice and grains to the population at. My other companions, through word of mouth, was assigned at Bantacan, that is an oil depot for the whole Philippines, they let the oil out to the river. The pull out to the river and you see here, you can see the river in blames and my other companion went to the high commissioner's residence at the basement, a big room for the meat processing and storage, and opened it to the public. And my other companion, when I signed that port area where they stopped the materials used by the U.S. Army, you can see the light from rugs, typewriter, radios and so many things. And they were all given out to the people before. They will be taken up by the Japanese army with they was declared open city. As I have said before, I was assigned to one station to see to it that the trains that you get is dynamite, supposedly the dynamite, the the bridges that they will over. But they were struck down by the Japanese airplane. It's all our trade is the first. And on the initiative, I went along the Goulburn Street, where they are lined up with various bodegas, went out,

bought rice, I went to bodegas and told the owner to open up there, but they got the weekend that we gave it up. So the people that this is scorched earth policy, instead of the rights being taken by the Japanese, we gave it to the people. So the whole population is covered getting such a prize. There's one instance in the day care caregiver wouldn't like to open the bidding. As I said, there's nothing that you can do if you let me use my duty as an officer to open up your food. They got out and I will I will be paid when you buy your claim after the war, I said there's nothing that we can do. They want to give you like the Japanese peanuts. So he opened up the. They got.

Celestino Almeda [00:17:38] When we heard that the U.S. Army entered Manila about that we wait for orders from Major and were gathered at a certain place at the corner of Gober and the Street. And from that, we hitchhiked and went to more pay for reprocessing as reserve officers of the Libyan army. In short, we went back to military control and. After a few days, oh, my, after three years in hunger you're given food, lots of food. So the next morning, everybody rush to the latrine because they ate some food, they had not eaten for the last three years. I sat there and I was inside with the construction of the Philippines is headquartered in a big abandoned building beside the capital, we're giving some lectures about how to form a company and drawing the contrast between then and so on. And we read lecture on the views of the combined and so on. A preliminary lecture before we were assigned an actual duty, I receive an order ordering us to report to what they call dogtown . Later I found out it's what we call now the. The airport in somewhere south. Well, as I. Those supervised building Quonset hut like Hana's after a month or so, we were assigned at the moment that they did not belong. But our duty was to maintain roads and bridges. And along the way, you take the test, you will see contains metal and helmet. Which was abandoned by the retreating army personnel after a month and a half with the special order, we were assigned at the Passport Battalion in Balad. But that's. Our duty then there was a steep drop in knowing that we had done the job, several of us came around and gave us a lecture and led us to be there just for one week. And they said that they learned the job in the United States for six months and we were trained for one week. Our workers there, and they are paid daily and as to how they're paid, I don't know because I'm not a judge, but I was assigned to supervise a loading the ships. In both battalions by labor, my labor is good, but one after the other leg, like it's a big one made of wood, we are loaded munitions. All sorts of equipment from the southwest Pacific. We had their weapons get here six by six, tractors, one until. And if we are loading equipment like that, it took us about a week and a half to unload one Liberty ship, but when we unload goods like grains, liquids, it takes us a band to unload a ship. In one instance, a ship much better than I could remember. The name of the ship. Is that the way? And I look at the options. Yes, we are Filipino Americans, so being at home and watching my dad at the captain's table for dinner and I don't know that one time it was birth, that I look at the floor, it's made of cement. And then another general told me, yes, on the ship are all made of cement because they are and have a building ships. So the it's just raised to make it by ship and. Uh. Sometimes we read, we are logit, you are in competition with the colored guys, another ship and our competition is walking along the ship. The was three. Imagine you're getting a lot gips with with the corresponding paper you can ride in a jeep and bring it outside look if you want to, but but that. Yeah, after the war. I tried to get some. Means of earning, we open up a store at our Hidalgo's street, I met a woman who is a dressmaker and because that's making industries that are prosperous. So I went on buying and selling because our place is some sort of a station for gifts coming from Marfin to Kabul. There are plenty of servicemen with rations in Burma, cigarettes and beer. And I began buying the cigarettes and beer until we had a pint of beer. This and I did not throw salads around Kabul. They hope the goods in the street. And one day, a friend of mine said that you like to go back to teaching. Well, maybe I will. So I went to Rodriguez Vocational High School and start teaching again, and after a

year I was recruited at the business school part school of Art as a teacher instructor. From that. Certain employees for me came around,

Celestino Almeda [00:27:42] they are looking for instructors, so I applied and were given tests that were about 13 of us will take the test. There are four of us who are selected and was told to report to be in an. I decided to pay because the pay is twice as what I had been saving up the small percentage. I didn't know that the threat that was given to us is a federal examination and we were classified as noncitizens, federal employees. The U.S. government. But the source and our position was evaluated by our local ground area, wage area commissioner. And I was graded at seven at an hourly rate of three pages and it doubled. I want to tell us the ability skilled worker during the time is 50 percent a month. So that is a pretty good job after six years. I resigned my position and become jobless again. Jobless, but I had my own business. I had by gift. Operating a. Passenger carrier between topeka and kepel. I took that business because I know a little bit out of it, in part because I imagine I imagine that this rose to 15 units in back and one of the best, the operator issued a 5 year franchise by the Public Service Commission, which is now called LTMRB, led in that position and regulatory board. I did not become rich, but I was able to send my 5 children through college by being a teacher and operator of the service.

Celestino Almeda [00:31:27] So in 1990. The national nationalization of the United States was approved into law that is giving us opportunity to apply for citizenship. Being a veteran, I applied and sent my application through my daughter, who is a permanent resident in America, on to pay the bills up to maladaptation, communicated a document or document. So I gathered my paper, make it open within one time when I visited America. My son Robert showed me into an office and found out that this law office. They have your record. I showed them all my records, then they are all stupendous. What's wrong? Then my son said that's why we are here. I filed my application But a long time. OK, I will copy your document, send it to the office. And they did not approve that. They will have the case with me. But you don't have to pay because you will pay me one thousand three hundred. But you pay payable by Monday and the balance is monthly. So I said I cannot stay and wait for the result because I'm only a visitor. All right, go home, Philbin's. But when you see an order within one day, get onboard the plane and come back, get power or take it. So I went home.

Celestino Almeda [00:33:56] After five months, I received an order to report at the embassy and U.S. Embassy then. They gave me some some interview or just the color of the flag, what the judge said after several questions, raise your right hand. I did not do that, I was taken out after that, said, go to the window with number one and get your number. So I checked my passport after two months, got up money for the transportation. I went to the United States and landed at the home of my son, Robert Almeda. Knowing that I had my own document, I brought it up to apply for some benefits such as health care, pensions. And John, I learned that in America in 1996, a blurry. I thought it would be easy to get the beds made, but I found out that you have to find out the hard way. I found out that your HIV is better than you are a second rate citizen. So I joined a group of Filipinos working for benefits headed by a certain ethic, that jigga. Our best encounter is when we march from Veterans Affairs office to the White House along the way, some may combat their application for benefits. We are taking on projects that allow jobs with generally the, I think, 1999 or year 2000 and then on. I am at Paramount Pictures of the Senate and the Congress and some offices working for benefits in a certain publication. I read that a certain short order from the European reporter was taken to hospital with a shattered arm. Cheating on a change in the American soldiers, hey, nurse, you give me a cigaret. The nurse took a cigaret from her pocket. Is that into the amount of drugs that are left? Hey,

what about my life? And the nurse did not hear that mine. So I said to myself, well, you are given something and you're to spend parishad to get the benefits of pot. But later, all I know is that he said he thought that, you know, so I have to join. I was able to join the group because I knew that. A piece of tape cannot drip the plot, but that bound together and made into a blow against the plot.

Celestino Almeda [00:38:18] So I joined the group. From then on there, almost two or three times a week were trudging the halls of Congress, teaching the congressman and head the opposite. What are the conditions of the World War Two veterans in the Philippines? You cannot blame those people in government because they don't know all that. All that they know is that the Philippines is, once upon a time, ateret the territory of the United States. But they are happening. They don't know. So I hope that this president today will be a legacy. As I have said before, my mother had gone to the IT. But my soul remains in your heart and mind, as I have said before. To get something, you have to fend for yourself. In the year 2000. I get them. They pass along the Equity Compensation Act that is giving 15000 for Filipino veterans of U.S. citizenship and nine thousand Filipino veterans in the Philippines. So I passed my application just like before when I applied for my citizenship. It took me six years before I could get the benefit. And on October 20, my year, 2017,

Celestino Almeda [00:40:40] In the halls of the U.S. capitol, then the secretary of Veterans Administration in his office and said I recognize the services of Celestino Almeda. And we were herded into a secret room, all of the veterans. And congress leader... what was his name... went around with a box with this. This is a Congressional Gold medal ordered to Filipino World War Two veterans. When The head of Congress came to me. He showed me the medal, so i get hold of it, so I get hold of it. Thank you. That was October 25 year, 2007. This Congressional medal was spearheaded by Major General Taguba, a retired U.S. Army. The purpose of the organization won by General Taguba is Veterans Recognition and Education program. So this program that we are in now, I hope will be. Something remembered by the young generations, Don. As I said before, my Stralman had built with the wind, but my soul remained in your heart and mind when I felt the ramp and not out of the capital, but the whole I pressed the U.S. government for recognizing our services as a veteran of World War Two. And I think several officers in charge and my day billfish. Old soldiers never die, they just fade away.