

Duty to Country

Filipino Veterans Recognition and Education Project

Interview Transcript: Rey Cabacar

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.

Sonny Izon [00:00:05] Future generations to be able to learn from, so we're going to start with so how old you were when the Japanese came?

Rey Cabacar [00:00:16] I was at that time, 14 years old, when they're

Sonny Izon [00:00:23] sorry I interrupted you to start off with where the Japanese came.

Rey Cabacar [00:00:30] When Pearl Harbor was attacked simultaneously, the Philippines was also attacked. That was December eight, 1941. As far as I remember. The Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor and also Manila and the Navy Yard and plowed, filled,

Sonny Izon [00:01:09] if you could, because many audiences don't understand the concept, the international dateline, the fact that Pearl Harbor was bombed in December 7th, it was already December 8th. Correct. So you could explain that.

Rey Cabacar [00:01:22] Well, in Hawaii, it's December seven, but they will cross the international date line going to the Philippines. It will change to December eight. That's why do not confuse the date of Pearl Harbor and the date in the Philippines, but it was the same day on only it was a different date.

Sonny Izon [00:01:57] So how old were you when all this happened?

Rey Cabacar [00:02:01] I was 14 years old when the attack in the Philippines came.

Sonny Izon [00:02:13] At this point, your father had passed already. He was dead. Yes.

Rey Cabacar [00:02:20] OK, so I was

Sonny Izon [00:02:21] you can tell me about the fact that because your father had already died, you were the sole son who was going to help the family.

Rey Cabacar [00:02:33] Yes, my father died 1938. And I was the only son that was with my mother, so I was the sole provider or helper to my family at that time.

Sonny Izon [00:02:54] So this is a lot of responsibility for a 14 year old. And and life must have been difficult. Can you can you talk a little bit about what were some of the things you had to do to help with the survival of the family?

Rey Cabacar [00:03:12] What I did at that time, I did a little bit of farming. Planted some potatoes, crop potatoes like of that sort, and also do a little bit fishing. And I provided some. Words for my mother, so he wished she had something to use to cook the meals at that time,

Sonny Izon [00:03:49] so you had to gather the firewood and chop?

Rey Cabacar [00:03:53] I sure did. So, yeah, I. The awards that they brought to my mother was already really for real because my mother was not that strong. She was weak.

Sonny Izon [00:04:10] And then you went fishing to provide.

Rey Cabacar [00:04:12] I did. Did some fishing also say,

Sonny Izon [00:04:18] OK, can you can you say that? So that includes the fact that you were fishing. It was not for recreation. You're fishing for survival. You fish the food for your family.

Rey Cabacar [00:04:29] I did fishing because. Fish in the Philippines is one of the most popular food for a family or anybody else. So that. Was a big help. For my mother.

Sonny Izon [00:04:53] I remember you told me a story where you had to cross one of the most dangerous rivers on a carabao, and how are you using the carabao horns as your steering wheel? Tell me that.

Rey Cabacar [00:05:05] Oh, yes, because the farm that I used to do work. I have to cross a river, which was four, which is the Santo Tomas River. That river is one of the most destructive river in the zone. And during rainy season, because they supply like rice is depleted. So I have to go back to town. And if it was raining, I have to ride my car about that. Carabao was drained once. We are at the bank of the river that carabao knew that we were going to cross the river, so I use the horn like holding a bicycle, and I tied a rope in the car about and to my waist line in case I. Fell down. Fortunately, the carabao was trained, so that's carabao landed and shielded I.

Sonny Izon [00:06:28] I want you to tell me that story and tell me when you're handling

Rey Cabacar [00:06:33] [in TAGALOG]

Sonny Izon [00:06:46] OK. See the difference? Absolutely. OK, so. So you're 14 and you wanted to join the guerrillas. Tell me.

Rey Cabacar [00:07:01] Well, I wanted to join the guerrilla. When I was 14. The best job that the guerrillas could have offered me. Was a runner. But they. For some reason. I did not go the guerrilla. Because. I didn't think at that time that is my job will be necessary.

Sonny Izon [00:07:40] So. But they kept telling you you were too young. They didn't want to take you. And by the way,

Rey Cabacar [00:07:48] yeah, I was still very young, say to me at that time.

Sonny Izon [00:07:55] So they didn't accept you because you of your age.

Rey Cabacar [00:07:57] Yeah, but and I was sure. And unfortunately, I'm born very close to the ground,

Sonny Izon [00:08:06] easier to evade bullets. Yeah. Anyway, so you were not able to join much to your disappointment, but then another opportunity came to be able to join the service because there was news flying around that the Navy was looking for recruits. So you heard about this and what did you do

Rey Cabacar [00:08:28] when we heard that the news was flying around that they are accepting a recruiting Filipinos who wants to join the Navy? My body and I, there's three of us decided to go no longer and the distance from Olongapo from my home. What is 32 miles, so we started around 8:00 in the morning and we got to Olongapo around 3:00 between 3:00 and 4:00 in the afternoon. So there the following day. We slept in Olongapo. Then we win. So where they were distributing the applications so we could go in the Navy, sure enough, this recruiter was shouting who holding the applications and who wants to join the Navy? I did raise my hand, so he gave me the obligation. And I was patient. I read the instruction that I have to fill, so I was holding up that application. For about a week. Every day I have to show my face near the office of the recruit recruiting office at that time, that gentleman. Came out and ask who is who has application? So I raised my hand, so he got that application and the same day we there were 11 of us. We had the physical examination. She. So very fortunately, I was one of the lucky ones that passed the physical examination.

Sonny Izon [00:10:44] You're telling me you were very concerned that the. If you would just look to Sunny, sorry. Oh, yeah, if you could look at something. Yeah, that's it. You were telling me that you're very concerned that you would feel the physical, you know, short stature and you thought you might be underweight. So tell me that.

Rey Cabacar [00:11:06] Yes. They lost. Part of the physical examination when the doctors step on the mystery scale, got my weight and got my height, the weight at the time I was only 105 and my height was five foot. So maybe I will be disqualified because of the height. But when the doctor finished that. The physical examination, he said, fine. So that was or I was in.

Sonny Izon [00:11:54] So you're really happy?

Rey Cabacar [00:11:55] I was happy.

Sonny Izon [00:11:59] Let me just go back because you went through a whole lot to get in. Why did you want to join the service? What was it that was motivating you?

Rey Cabacar [00:12:12] There are there were three reasons. Why, I joined, of course, at that time. I was a little bit ignorant. Because I never went outside the country, so the swearing in officer. It's told us before we raised our hand. That you are all volunteer. And this is what you are going to do. Those of you today still want to change their mind, you can do so. He gave us a newspaper to read. So. The Syrian officer said this part of the newspaper, I was able to read the part because I was already in the fifth grade at the time or sixth grade, rather. When the war broke out. Another one of the group, however. Could not read. The newspaper headline and the headline at that time read. President Roosevelt died. But he was not able to read the headline because he didn't mean in school was only second grade, so the swearing in officers told him, son, we like you, but you can't read. So the he was the only one that was rejected because she cannot read the paper.

Sonny Izon [00:14:14] Let's let's go back to the three things that motivated you to to join the first. It sounds like said the first one was that because he had never been out of the country and the Navy was going to be one way to see the world, can you see that and then go to the other two?

Rey Cabacar [00:14:30] Well, because at that time, it was war, what was going on, so I figured that to serve the country come first. The second, because of poverty, we were poor and we knew at that time that the United States Navy is a good source of income. So and the third one is I wanted to see the world.

Sonny Izon [00:15:11] That you did. So right after you took your. Your pledge, what was your first assignment?

Rey Cabacar [00:15:24] A week after I we I was sworn in. My order came. I was wondering what the order was. Fortunately, it was still in the Philippines and I was assigned to. The unit was called Naval Beach Parties, Navy, three or two that were still in Soviet Army. So that unit was. As far as I remember, I was responsible for upkeep of P.T. boats before they go out for a mission. They made sure that. Supplies and whatever they need to go out is provided. Because both. Or the. We'll have to go along the coast of the Philippines. Because at that time. Japan was noted for the kamikaze one man submarine like the short sea, so they pretty much was their mission to seek to seek or shake that box or a submarine of the Japanese.

Sonny Izon [00:17:06] Now, while you were doing this job at Subic, uh, maintaining the votes, there was a young man that you saw who would later become a very famous statesman of the United States. Tell me about that story

Rey Cabacar [00:17:22] years later, though. That young man that I saw

Sonny Izon [00:17:27] him four years later start with what I was doing, the boat maintenance I saw, OK,

Rey Cabacar [00:17:35] when I was in that unit, the those speedboats. Every day they land there and. One of the. Many rebatable. Who was then in charge?

Sonny Izon [00:17:56] I'm so sorry. I'm sorry. That's the you. I'm going to start over. Are you OK? Yeah, we should start clapping. So let's just start when I was doing. Maintenance of the boats. I saw this young man. Well.

Rey Cabacar [00:18:16] When? I was in that unit. I saw this gentleman or officer because I was working in eMESH, I was one of those who served them because that was the job that was given to me, so. He was. One of those who are in charge of depletable. And I did not know until years later when I was already in that one of those, both commander, was President Kennedy.

Sonny Izon [00:19:13] So then now, four years later, when you're working at the Navy Yard

Rey Cabacar [00:19:17] and when he was elected as president, I was stationed in the Navy Yard and very fortunately, the boss, my boss told me that. Once in your life, you will probably see inauguration of a president so you can take the day off and go and watch the

parade. So I walked. Navy Yard, so Pennsylvania Avenue at about, oh, eight o'clock in the morning, and it was very cold, it was 15 degrees at that time. So that parade lasted until sunset. And the last. Part of the parade when that boat was paraded, and I know it reminded me about the boat where my first assignment was.

Sonny Izon [00:20:28] So this must have been. A very emotional field day for you to know that your service somehow is connected to the president of the United States. How did you feel watching him take his oath, watching the people tell me what was it? And if you want to say technology again, what were you feeling?

Rey Cabacar [00:21:12] [in TAGALOG] He was waving his hand to the public. See, then they recognize his face.

Sonny Izon [00:21:24] OK, OK, so let's go back to once you were done with the eight boats, then you were given another assignment, I think, on a destroyer. Is that right?

Rey Cabacar [00:21:36] Yes. After eight months on that the. I signed I was given the word that I have to go back. Our come to the United States because at that time. Did we win? Said they go by points, see how far you are away from the country, which means America. So I had all the points, so then I was shipped to America. And. Was given a new assignment. But however, in When I Reach America. Those in a receiving station to reassure Alan. Say. So the first assignment was given to me was staff. Of the commander Third Fleet. So I. Well, I stayed in that assignment for about one year because at that time the third plate was. Decommissioned or abolished? So they sent me back to the receiving station in Yerba Buena Island to Treasure Island. So I was given a new assignment. That assignment was a destroyer. Destroyer, minesweeper,

Sonny Izon [00:23:27] let's stop this for a second, just so we can identify some people may not know where Treasure Island is. That's the one off of San Francisco, right?

Rey Cabacar [00:23:36] Yes. Treasure Island. Yeah.

Sonny Izon [00:23:38] If you can just say Treasure Island is is off the coast of

Rey Cabacar [00:23:44] Treasure Island is between Oakland and San Francisco. That is man made island.

Sonny Izon [00:23:54] She is the site of the nineteen thirty nine world's fair same time as it was in New York. So that's how I remember it. Yeah. OK, so you have your second destroyer, the minesweeping assignment. Yes, but that must have been dangerous.

Rey Cabacar [00:24:11] Oh, yes, that destroyer. Is this small ship? And it was a sign or was moored in San Diego, so. I. Was very unhappy because I was the only. Asian or Filipino at the ship at that time. But I got used to it and that destroyer to me made a man out of me because. I stayed on that ship for four years. From the ship, we. We go different places in the Pacific, like in China, for instance, in the 1947.

Sonny Izon [00:25:18] So let's go back just a little bit so people can know the nature of the job you were actually decommissioning or exploding mines that were floating in the Pacific

Rey Cabacar [00:25:31] during the Korean War

Sonny Izon [00:25:33] when you were doing in the mines?

Rey Cabacar [00:25:35] Yes, when I was on board that ship.

Sonny Izon [00:25:37] All right. So explain that in terms of what the nature of the job was. Well.

Rey Cabacar [00:25:43] Whenever a Korean War broke out. The ship, which I was that destroyer, because it is a minesweeper. We were the first one to go to Japan. I'm in Korea and in Korea, we that ship is equipped with minesweeping like she of that sort because. Mines were tabled and it is about two or three feet below the surface, so that those mines have to be the cable has to be cut so that the mine will flow and we can see. So you pick up. No, no, no, we. Sunk or destroyed their minds by using the 40 millimeter gun of the ship.

Sonny Izon [00:26:49] So you would you would cut the cable floor? Yeah, and you would shoot it with your 14 millimeter. OK, tell me that in that sequence.

Rey Cabacar [00:27:00] Uh, basically only think of someone. Yeah, no, because that was a the mindset. Once they hit the ship. Oh, my gosh. The forward part of the ship will be destroyed. So. When, during the day. When we are sweeping. I we have to use the life jacket I was assigned to the missile or galley, so I was joking and I have my life jacket with me. Were you scared? No, I was not scared. I got used to that, though, because I see.

Sonny Izon [00:27:57] So you're cooking with a life jacket? Yes. OK. All right, so, yeah, would it be? Those first four years. It sounded like. Stuff. Filipinos there. I'm curious. Prejudice, no. I want to push, but no, no, no, I understand. Could I say something to my dad and. Yeah, please get going.

Speaker 3 [00:28:34] Sammy and Sammy ask you a question you don't have to say yes, just repeat what he says. He says, How old are you? You just say, I was seven years old. OK, just just don't have to say yes. He's asking you to repeat what he says and answer it.

Sonny Izon [00:28:52] Is that what you do? No, he's doing it. We're going to go back to your four years. Thank you. Thank. Thank you. We're going to go back to the four years on that made you a man. It sounded like it was a challenging assignment. [in TAGALOG]

Rey Cabacar [00:29:25] Well, because I was ignorant. At that time. When I was in the compartment. I was with the. Black Americans, but it didn't really matter to me because I didn't know if she. Until years and years in service then that the. Prejudice. Came up. That's how I learned.

Sonny Izon [00:30:03] What was so tough about these four years, obviously, is you say it made you a man staying those four years. What were some of the experiences that transformed you from from being a boy to man?

Rey Cabacar [00:30:23] Destroyer. Why I, I it made a man out of me. Because once the ship go out to sea. They if you go through rough seas and sometimes it's a 45 degree roll. Say. And I was seasick. but. As years go on, I was able to. We stood the. rough seas. And I was I was not never seasick anymore. That's why I said that destroyer made a man out of me in some way. [in TAGALOG]

Sonny Izon [00:32:14] Excuse me, guys, sorry. Oh.

Rey Cabacar [00:32:25] Oh, yeah,

Sonny Izon [00:32:26] that's a valid reason, you know. OK. So. Um, let's let's go back to Korea. OK, so you were involved with the Korean War. So what were your duties during that time?

Rey Cabacar [00:32:58] During the Korean War. Because my ship was assigned there, a sweeping mine. My military duty besides my. A regular duty. I was like what you call a medic's. The idea I was given, they are some medical equipment so that some some will be endured. I was one of the school to perform the Forsayth. That was my military duty.

Sonny Izon [00:33:45] Did you have any casualties?

Rey Cabacar [00:33:46] Oh, yes.

Sonny Izon [00:33:48] Tell me about that.

Rey Cabacar [00:33:48] The the ship was hit by your battery. She and. I. When I left the ship now, this happened after I left the ship. But she I heard that the my shipmate. What in your say?

Sonny Izon [00:34:26] So you serve how many years?

Rey Cabacar [00:34:30] I served in the Navy for 25 years. From where it went from nineteen forty five up to nineteen. Sixty nine.

Sonny Izon [00:34:48] OK, say that again, I serve from

Rey Cabacar [00:34:51] from nineteen forty five,

Sonny Izon [00:34:54] complete sentence.

Rey Cabacar [00:34:56] I serve in the Navy for 25 years. Nineteen forty five, up to nineteen sixty nine.

Sonny Izon [00:35:09] So you retired in 1969?

Rey Cabacar [00:35:12] Yes, I retired in 1969. And fortunately, I was able to. Go back and work for the government.

Sonny Izon [00:35:24] And what did you do?

Rey Cabacar [00:35:26] I was my. Work in the government was the same thing I was doing in the Navy ship, I was the ship of the director of the FBI.

Sonny Izon [00:35:41] So you you've got to be a really good cook.

Rey Cabacar [00:35:45] I cannot answer that because I was selected, so I must be. Because at the later part of my neighbor, my neighbor Carol. When I was assigned to some flag flying mesh, the admirals in the Navy and my last duty assignment. While

working for the vice chief of naval operation, so. I guess that. When I was interviewed for the work in FBI. I mentioned those assignments, so there's no doubt that. What I have done. And what they will do there is I'm qualified in a very.

Sonny Izon [00:36:49] What's your favorite dish to make? International like what?

Rey Cabacar [00:36:55] Well. Kalamian young daughters are Filipinas. So. [in TAGALOG]

Sonny Izon [00:37:17] it's

Rey Cabacar [00:37:31] [in TAGALOG]

Sonny Izon [00:37:32] And so looking back to the. On your service, twenty five years. What are you most proud of? About the service,

Rey Cabacar [00:37:46] all about the service. I wish I could repeat what they did. See, because if Michael. Go back, I mean, still violate the law. Because service. It may not be the most lucrative. But. Despite your Isdell. Financially.

Sonny Izon [00:38:23] So do you think looking back in nineteen forty five, when you are a young man and you were thinking you had three objectives you wanted to help provide for your family, uh, you wanted to serve, you wanted to see the world. Were you able to achieve the goals that you set for yourself? In nineteen forty five, did you achieve those?

Rey Cabacar [00:38:51] Yes. I was able to achieve what I had in my mind because we were very poor. So the salary that I had when I started in the Navy. That was enough for the support of my family, my mother and also his. A degree of my brother who became a doctor because of the help I gave to my mother I made and I loved men that my mother. At that time, eighty dollars a month, and that was enough for my to support and for my brother to go to college.

Sonny Izon [00:39:46] Now, looking back a few years, when you received. Your Congressional Gold medal. Can you remember that day when you were there?

Rey Cabacar [00:39:58] Oh, yeah,

Sonny Izon [00:39:59] how you feel if you want to say, look, it's OK.

Rey Cabacar [00:40:04] I was very proud to have been awarded. The Congressional Medal. Because behind that middle. Is something that I share with all my comrades who have served, who died. And physically reshape the middle, but deep in my heart, they were all also included.

Sonny Izon [00:40:39] Good, you want. Yeah, we have just a few more minutes wondering if we can read haven't read this thing. Yeah, well, there's that before that. Even any, um, legislative work in the second.

Unidentified [00:40:53] Obviously, the that. We talk about that

Sonny Izon [00:40:57] for a little bit. The bill that you wrote.

Rey Cabacar [00:40:59] Yeah, but Angle, I will read what I have yet.

Sonny Izon [00:41:04] Not yet. We will just want you to talk a little bit about your advocacy work in terms of getting legislation to help Filipino veterans and. Oh, yeah, the work that you do with the adequate that you know, all

Rey Cabacar [00:41:18] those I mean, they watch the post commander shape because I have them veterans of Foreign Wars. Don't look at me. Oh yeah. You look. Yeah, I. Submitted for resolutions, say it was one of the member of the resolution committee. Those forum solutions were. Uh. You're still young. She. Upkeep of the cemetery. Of the American cemetery in Blackfield. The Filipino veterans were able to. Become a citizen so that they can bring their family. And in America. And. The most important there is the equality bill that the equity bill. Is about the salary of the Filipinos who, by virtue of his office, President Roosevelt made them all Filipino. I mean, United States Army of the Far East. But however, this holiday was still not part. The Americans receiving dollar and Filipinos were receiving 50 cents. That was one of those resolutions that I submitted when I was deposed commander. And those resolutions were. Adopted and approved by the body and was submitted to Congress and eventually everything will be all night. Those resolutions that I submitted and President Obama signed. Those resolutions.

Sonny Izon [00:43:50] OK, I'm going to have you do that. We're going to try and condense it. So if you can say that during your term as post commander, you submitted several resolutions to help the Filipino veterans and then you can count up. I know you said before, but I think the only three. So just whatever whatever you remember. But let's just do it in a more compact way. But my mother reminded that in a minute know as post commander of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, I submitted several resolutions to help the Filipino veterans and just about whatever you remember.

Rey Cabacar [00:44:38] As post commander. The details of war or Bush, five, four, 71, General Douglas MacArthur, WashingtonPost. I attended the Veterans of Foreign Wars National Convention. At that time, I was a part of the resolution committee, so I submitted for resolutions the bill. That'll help the Filipinos in the salary and then the upkeep of the American cemetery in Blakefield. And then Filipino's of veterans can become citizens of this country and they restore the. Veterans Hospital. In Manila. All three were approved and adopted except the restoration of the American Veterans Hospital in Manila. Unfortunately, at that time. President Arroyo was in that. In the hospital, so America will not dare touch. And those some kind of repair. In in lieu of that. A clinic was erected only for minor ailments.

Sonny Izon [00:46:23] OK, so the second part of you can say that the. The resolutions were accepted, submitted to Congress, and then eventually became adopted,

Rey Cabacar [00:46:34] yes, the resolutions that were approved and eventually. Signed by the president, the Filipinos who were. Are eligible to receive the equity bill, got 50000. For those who are citizen and nine thousand for those who are not comparison because the cost of living is higher in America than those who are living in the Philippines.

Sonny Izon [00:47:18] It can be the case that he wanted to do just that and in the briefcase.

Rey Cabacar [00:47:30] Open this for me just.

Unidentified [00:47:41] And he was talking about.

Sonny Izon [00:47:46] Yeah, just a nice cut away to

Rey Cabacar [00:47:48] give me my glasses.

Sonny Izon [00:47:50] You didn't see Miles anywhere else, but you did see that. Yeah, we used just like and support the. Right, thank you. Yeah. Eight hours. Rule of thumb is that. That's a good clip. Yeah. OK, so you want this to camera reading, so, yeah, so so be looking down, I'm guessing. Well, talk back and forth, so weighty, but what have I been up small?

Rey Cabacar [00:48:32] Well, of course, yeah,

Sonny Izon [00:48:34] yeah, if I'm going to be doing anything with the. The chair, oh, so I can help. Am I right? But. Good. That's where we're still writing. Yes, I think any time you're ready

Rey Cabacar [00:49:04] or is an episode measured by change, but ultimately peace and tranquility will prevail. It's warring factions will exert every effort and means in order to be victorious. Unfortunately, there will be a loser. The victor, however, must respect and honor the painful decision with compassion, prudence and humility. America went through two major. Conflict. World War One and World War Two because America possessed a formidable strength. America was victorious, Europe was one victim of the war. Suffered enormous casualties and destruction. America came. Driskill. Displayed and offered each compassion. Marshall Plan. Was implemented is slow, but your. Recovery was achieved, the icon, General Douglas MacArthur, did similar in Japan today, thanks to America economically, Japan is now leading the free world. Once careful now, an ally. In love and spirit, for those noble at America's greatness, is well respected. The American flag is flying high, its star spangled represent the land of the free and the home of the brave. God bless America. Thank you.