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Cultivating A Culture Of Connecting



*Artwork by Antonelli Q. Salayon of Simon A. Sanchez High School
Courtesy of the 2019 Liberation 75 Education Committee*

Every generation endures at least one “day of infamy” - a day that, for better or worse, enjoys immortality in the memories of those who lived the experience. These moments change the world we live in, sometimes overnight, and in ways that shape how we raise the generations to come. This could not be more true than today as we’ve only just reached the halfway mark of 2020. A global pandemic, nation-wide backlash against institutional racism and injustice, dire climate change crises, and divisive political terrains are just a few of the obstacles we’ve faced this year, making it one of the most trying in recent history. For all of us, and our youth in particular, this year has ushered in a lion’s share of infamy. 2020 gives us a sobering view of a

rapidly changing world, and we watch with anxious hope for some endpoint so we can better determine how to move forward in uncharted territory.

We are reminded of this more so in Guam as we approach the annual commemoration of the end of the World War II occupation celebrated as “Liberation Day.” There won’t be a carnival and grand parade, nor the solemn gatherings to commemorate the massacres, marches, and mayhem that Guam’s people endured in a war not of their making. For the past seven decades, we have celebrated these traditions secure in our familiarity with how to answer the call to remember this living history. What now, in this age of social distancing and a generation that is more and

more removed from our war survivors and their memories? This 76th anniversary presents challenges that make us feel all but liberated from the crippling weight of the current day.

Yet, in the spirit of resiliency that is the centerpiece of our rich and long history, we forge ahead by looking to our past. Our *mañaina* were master navigators whose wisdom and strength have steered us into the future. To help bridge the stories of these master navigators with our youth who now face hardship beyond anything their generation could ever anticipate, Guampedia humbly invites the community to join “Culture of Connecting,” a four-part virtual series where the wartime experiences of

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our *mañaina* are put into conversation with the difficult times in which we now live.

Culture of Connecting offers a virtual “back kitchen table” where we can all gather to share stories that will help us in charting a better reality than what the world has dealt us. These conversations will draw on stories of suffering and triumph, highlighting the coping skills, resources, and cultural values that became the tools for survival when all else failed. These conversations will illuminate just how important our past is in approaching the life-altering impacts of the last several months. In re-centering the human experience of WWII on Guam, we offer our youth a bridge to their past, a bridge to their future. Join Culture of Connecting, and be a part of that bridge.



Photo courtesy of Guam War Survivor Stories

Agnes “Neng” Guzman Duenas Unpingco, born 1930, was 11 years old when the war broke out on Guam. Unpingco was the oldest of the eight children of Jose Duenas (Familian Pepero) and Maria Pangelinan Guzman. Unpingco and her family had been living in the San Antonio District of Hagåtña up until the day of the attack. She remembers being at the Catholic Mass to celebrate Santa Marian Kamalen’s feast day when she

Register Today

Guampedia’s virtual “back kitchen table” community outreach program is in collaboration with the University of Guam and the Center for Pacific Islands Studies, University of Hawai’i at Mānoa. These community conversations will feature guest presenters, open discussions and curated content from guampedia.com. For those interested in this program, please email guampedia@gmail.com.

Series I Schedule and Themes: Programs will run from 10:00 - 11:30 a.m. CHamoru Standard Time

Monday, July 13. Fanhasso: War for Guam

Monday, July 20 Culture & Values in Crisis

Monday, July 27 Lancho: Survival & Sustainability

Monday, August 3 Our Island, Our History: Commemorating & Connecting

War Survivor: Agnes Duenas Unpingco

saw the planes and heard the bomb explosions.

During the occupation, many families had to be resourceful and depend on relatives, neighbors, and friends to survive the devastation and cruelty of war. Unpingco’s father did not farm, but his trade as a shoemaker helped them get food.

“I had little brothers and sisters that needed milk, you know. My uncle was giving us milk ... whatever we had, even when we had a little chicken, we would make kado’ (soup). We would all help.”

During the march to Manenggon, Unpingco recalls being slapped by Japanese guards when she slowed down or stopped to rest.. Upon arriving

at Manenggon, her father and uncle quickly built a shelter made of bamboo and coconut leaves. Her mother boiled the river water to avoid dysentery, except in the few times that she was told to kill the fire.

By the end of the war, Unpingco was 14 with maturity and strength brought upon by the experiences of that time. The threat of being beaten or killed gave her the courage to overcome adversity. She was vigilant over her siblings, and acquired excellent cooking and sewing skills from her mother. Married in 1947, these skills helped to support her 11 children.

Click here to view our [“Fanhasso: War for Guam”](#) section and read the full war story of Agnes and other survivors.

WWII Monuments and Sites

Insular Force Monument, Hågatña

On December 10, 1941, 120 Guam Insular Guardsmen took their battle position at the Plaza de España to defend against the invading Japanese Imperial Army. The defense at the Plaza de España was the only pitched ground battle fought. The guardsmen, with limited military training, were armed with three machine guns and Springfield single bolt action rifles. After half an hour of fighting, US Navy Captain George McMillan officially surrendered, preventing a senseless massacre of the Guam defenders.



CHagui'an Memorial, Yigo

The CHagui'an Memorial site, on the north-central plateau of Guam, is where the largest known single act of violence on Guam occurred, just at the end of World War II. Among the thousands of CHamorus held at the Mangenggon camp, a group of men, young and old, were forced to carry supplies to an Imperial Japanese



*CHagui'an Memorial
Courtesy of GoogleMaps*

Army command post nearby CHagui'an in Yigo. They were killed by the Japanese to prevent them from providing information to the Americans. As the American forces drove the Japanese northward, they came across scenes of atrocities inflicted against CHamorus. On August 8, a gruesome discovery was made near CHagui'an by

a Marine Regiment - a truck loaded with 24 decapitated bodies. As the search continued the following morning, 21 more bodies were found at CHagui'an.

Tinta & Faha, Malesso'

On July 15, 1944, about 800 Malesso' residents were rounded up and taken by soldiers to the Geus River Valley in Tinta. The Japanese commander of the area read aloud the names of the most influential citizens of the southern village. The 30 people listed were told they were going to be part of a work crew. Marched to a cave in the Tinta area to stay the night, soldiers tossed hand grenades through the opening, killing many of the CHamorus. The Japanese soldiers then took swords and bayonets and began stabbing anyone still alive. However, by pretending to be dead, 14 of the CHamorus survived.

On 16 July, with almost identical circumstances, another group of men were marched to Faha. These men were some



*Map of Guam provided by
GoogleMaps*

of the tallest and strongest villagers. It is speculated that the Japanese again used machine guns, grenades, and bayonets to kill the villagers. None of the Faha victims survived. When the Malesso people learned of the massacres, they were outraged and rebelled, killing nearly all Japanese soldiers in the area, thus liberating themselves.

Manenggon Memorial, Yona

On 12 July 1944, the Japanese command ordered the relocation of people from their homes to camps. The largest and most known was in the Manenggon valley in Yona. During those last days of war, Manenggon Valley became home to about 75% of the island's population which was about 18,000 people at the time. People used the Manenggon River's waters to wash themselves and their clothes, and for cooking. They built shelters of wooden frames and coconut leaves. Heavy rains came and flooded these temporary homes. Every day groups of men were taken from Manenggon to various worksites around the area.

[Click here to read up on Guam's twenty-three WWII sites, memorials, monument, and locations!](#)

When Wars End, Lessons Remain

Guampedia staff, Lazaro Quinata, retells the war stories of his grandfather and the lessons he has learned from them in this article commemorating the war experience.

Storytelling has always been a part of my family's life. Among all the storytellers in my family, none however, were as skilled as my papa. He could command any room he was in with his booming voice, articulate speech, and near-photographic memory -- which he often used to tell a story so vivid that my cousins and I could retell it as if we were there ourselves. When he spoke about the past, nothing was ever too unimportant to go untold. Not the challenges of raising nine children, or the bitter cold of the Korean War, and most especially, not what life was like during World War II.

Stories about the war often came up with my cousins and I sitting around the kitchen table in his *lancho* as a way to entertain us. He was only seven when the war had come to Guam and was old enough to understand what was happening around him. As we sat together waiting for lunch, he sometimes would tell us how hungry he got during the war. He said the Japanese took the vegetables his family grew and the animals they raised in order to feed themselves. As a result, his *Tata* would go out at night and try to catch birds with a makeshift slingshot, risking harsh punishments in order to feed my papa and his seven siblings.

He told us tales about his sister, Di'di, who was taken by the Japanese to the south of Guam for work detail. Instead of following the Japanese, Di'di had escaped the group as they travelled south, crossing rivers and hills until finally reuniting with her family. My papa talked about her bravery and

intelligence, saying that "maybe she experienced hunger and thirst and all that, but those were minor factors, as far as her desire to survive." Seeing how easily young children could adopt a sense of contempt for the Japanese invaders, my papa never forgot to mention the soldiers who showed kindness to him, telling us that "some of the Japanese soldiers, they're not really, really bad. After work, they

have one sock, and they put rice, uncooked rice in there, and take it and give it to us." Stories like these made the war something more than a unit in a book. It was a real experience with real people, people we knew, people we could talk to.

After remembering these stories from my papa, I am faced with two realizations. First, how deeply important these stories were, and continually are, in guiding me through my own life. Whenever I was hungry or felt some slight discomfort, I would remember my papa's experiences and remind myself that there are others younger than me who have suffered far more. This sense of putting my life in perspective became an essential philosophy that translated into everything I did. My papa's experiences

with the soldiers who showed him kindness served as constant reminders that there is inherent goodness in everyone. That kindness is something present in all people and that I could give that same kindness freely to those around me. I may never experience war or hunger, but the stories that my papa told revealed lessons about life, lessons that I apply everyday as I live my own.

Second, that the telling and retelling of stories are ways to keep my papa, those like him, and their lessons alive. When wars end, it's us, those who choose to listen, who are able to pass on the wisdom of the generations that came before to those who have yet to be. As we listen to our elders, we not only internalize their years of experience and knowledge, but give them new life within us. Their sacrifices, struggles, and triumphs reverberate within us and everything we do, adding to a long and enduring story of our people that is continually being told.



War survivor Elias Castro Taitano surrounded by his grandchildren. Photo Courtesy of Sylvia T. Calvo

Commemorating the 76th Liberation Anniversary

Despite the social limitations we find ourselves in today, there are still a number of ways to honor and commemorate the war experience.

1. Visit Guampedia's [Fanhasso section](#) and read up on stories about the invasion, occupation, and retaking of Guam during the war.
2. Offer thoughts and flowers with friends and family at the numerous [memorials around the island](#).
3. Talk to the war survivors and [hear the stories](#) of their childhood.

