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AIOH-16, Dick Jeong
Interviewer Anna Cheng
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Saturday, 3:30 PM
In Mr. Dick Jeong's living room.

D: There aren't many of us left.

A: I know--it's very sad and I was very excited to interview you. The first question--there are seven questions--is about your life in China before you immigrated America.

D: Yeah well, I was a student actually. I was considered fortunate because my father was here. He didn't make too much money but at least you know he had money to send back. We did live a little better life than the rest of the farmers. I went to school there and I came over when I was about 17, so I didn't even graduate from high school yet. That's that's high school...is it okay? <red light on tape recorder blinking> is...is? <slight laughter> Sometimes it might not work you know.

A: Oh no...I had it tested.

D: Is it recording?

A: Yes, the red light is on.

D: Yeah okay, next question?

A: Where and when were you born?

D: As I said, I was born in Zhongsan, which is a county in Guangdong province. And my village is called Qiansan. Qiansan, Cheensan <said in Cantonese>, yours is Huptao <said in Cantonese>. Mine is Cheensan. Literally it means "coin mountain". That that is what the Chinese people called it.

A: Which year were you born in?

D: I was 1922, which makes me almost about 83 years old.

A: How large was your family? What did your family do for a living?

D: Oh well, I don't have much of a family because uh my mother died when I was only 8 years old. My father still over here. I came over by what they call a "paper son". "Paper son" is uh you know...is not real

A: <Cuts in> artificial

D: Artificial- yeah. Only. So uh so uh I came over 1939 which is uh actually world war two. I came over because the Japanese took over our village so we went down to Hong Kong and stayed there for about a year and my father got us some money and bought the appear. Bought me a paper. I was young then. I wasn't really care about coming over you know. But any way. I came over in 1939...I left around June 1939. I go here around...let's see, I have the date <pulls out an index card from shirt pocket and reads off a date> I go t here on June 4th. June 4th. So I stayed there till July 31, a little more than a moth on Angel Island. I was really lucky because uh I was young and very easy to do. A lot of people stayed there. Some people stayed there a year, a couple of years. So uh any way I uh I was granted entry on July 31st. that's the day I landed in San Francisco, San Francisco, San Francisco...not Angel...Angel Island Angel Island June 4th, 1939.

A: How and why did you decide to come to America?

D: well because there was a war there. Because the Japanese and Chinese...World War II-- actually Sino war. So uh...just that's that's the year I came over other wise I would probably stay in china because it takes a lot of money to bring me over. You know at that time my father was not even a cook, he was a cook's help. So he doesn't make too much money. Because when I came over at that time he only made \$90 a month which isn't too much but you can live off that amount years ago...yeah years ago. We all had a hard time.

A: I read about how if you were 17 years old, it would probably cost \$1,700 for a paper son...you could could up to \$100 per each...

D: Well actually my father bought it for \$2,000 U.S. \$2,000...

A: Wow, that's very very much...

D: So that's not cheap. At that time, it's not cheap its like \$30-40,000 right now <laughs>. Yeah so of course \$2,000 they have to pay bribery, or whatever you know, the guys does the paper work, and everything else. So I don't know actually how much uh ...the uh guy actually gets...the ...my...my phony father. Because he has two sons...actually...no, one son. He didn't want to bring him over so he sold the paper and he want back ...he went back to China one time yeah. So. that is how...how he...in those days, whenever the Chinese go back they call it "re-enter" they will report that they have a son, never a daughter. Because its always a son. The son is very important. So any way, so he went back to China sometime before 39, I think 39. So he does on the record he had a son. So that how we how we sold the identity to me, to my father. It's it's- I am not the only one. There are quite a few people like that. Because that time it was not easy to come over. You know they have prejudice and yeah...all kinds of discrimination.

A: Discrimination laws.

D: Yeah so so the Chinese ... anyways, migration officer take your money too.

A: The next part is about your voyage: Did you make the trip alone or were you with other people?

D: No I was make my trip alone. I came over on the US President Coolidge. Coolidge. I think there was about four or five ships then. Mine was Coolidge. I think they have Wilson and I think there...I forgot quite a few. They were called President Line. Fare is uh at that time was only \$110, 4th class. A little better than the lowest class.

A: What was the lowest class?

D: The lowest class is called dai chong <said in Cantonese>. In other words, its all...

A: One giant...

D: its all in the bottom, giant thing, with cots. All these cots so its that's the cheapest. The one I had was 6 people in a room. Double-decker. So which it's a little better than those guys out there. So anyways.

A: When you were coming over to Angel Island did you know about Angel Island? Did you know that they were going to take you there?

D: No I don't know anything. Don't know anything. Actually I was ...uh you know...paper son. They make up all these stories. You know they make up something so they can jive with the...uh...when they interview you. Yeah when they interview you. I was supposed to study that but I never did study it. And I was suppose to throw it out in the ocean before I dock. But I carried it with me all the way.

A: Do you still have it?

D: Yeah I still have it. Yeah.

A: Wow.

D: You know when you are young you don't care.

A: You don't think about it.

D: You don't care. Actually I didn't care. You know I didn't know what the situation was. I just came over and that's it. And I speak a little bit of English then. A little more advantageous. Uh as far as I can remember my interview only lasted 15-20 minutes. So maybe he was impressed with me or he already got bribed, I don't know. But any way I was one of the lucky one that got off pretty easily. Really easy actually.

A: What specific things did you bring?

D: What specific things? What what?

A: Things that you bring?

D: No, just one little suit case. Not ..I don't remember what I had inside there but not not too much. Not too much. I had less than 40 US in my pocket.

A: How did you get that money? Did the people from the village?

D: No no, from my father; my father sent it to me.

A: What were the conditions on the boat coming to America? Where did you sleep, how crowded was the boat? Where and what did you eat?

D: Like I said, uh, it's just some people down in the lowest class underground. But I was uh paid a little more then uh. I don't know how much they paid for lowest class, but I paid 110 bucks. Uh so, the eating was good. I didn't recall any extraordinary prejudice against us or me. A lot of those guys work on the ship was Asian anyways. So we don't feel...very...except we can go up to the second class. Third class, we considered third class, third class, broken down to different sections.

A: So how long were you on the ship...the boat? For one month?

D: Let's see... I say, little less than one month.

A: What did you do to make the time go by? Walk around the ship?

D: Keep um, look around and talk to people. Seemed to have a good time.

A: Did you encounter any problems along the way?

D: No...nono there were no problems.

A: Were there any fights? There was always good decent food? People where healthy?

D: No problems. Yeah yeah yeah, pretty decent, pretty decent. That's uh yeah. I didn't encounter any difficulties.

A: Were people excited to go to America, to San Francisco?

D: No, I think most of them pretty nervous because they don't know what the future holds for them <laughs>.

A: Were you confident? Because you were so young and your father was watching over you.

D: Well, I didn't...I didn't think too much of it. You know its just a trip. You get there okay, you don't get there its okay too. So so it's that kind of ...what you call it, a young type. you don't know much about the world so you just go along and uh that is about it.

A: The next part, detention at Angel Island there will be some pretty long questions. So when did you arrive? Where did you first land? What happened when you landed?

D: Well as I said, I uh, I got to Angel Island June 4th 1939, and uh, the conditions weren't that bad. It was just crowded. We had a big hall, and three decks. Since I was young, they assigned me to the top deck, you know it's a bunk bed. Three levels. So I guess in that hall, probably 120-150 people. It's a hall.

A: Have you been back to Angel Island?

D: Yeah yeah I have been back.

A: I went on a tour...

D: My children have been back. Uh, not much there now. They took all the bunk bed out. But is till remember where I slept. So yeah...the hall outside it's a little outside space. There is basketball court which is about 15 by 30 feet. That is where we go out for fresh air. So.

A: How often did you get to go out?

D: Well every day, everyday you can go out because there was fencing. Just like a prison yard but its uh...

A: Could you go out maybe 10 minutes everyday?

D: No we can go out anytime. Its open. It's a big hall but outside there is a fenced yard with a basket ball court there. I don't recall any one playing basketball there.

A: In your room, how many people did you share it with?

D: As I said somewhere around 150 people. It's a big big hall.

A: Where there any things besides beds?

D: There was nothing. No entertainment no thing.

A: Was it dirty?

D: No, it was not dirty, it was pretty sanitary, but it was crowded. It was crowded.

A: Did everyone clean up after themselves—is that why?

D: Yeah yeah, they cleaned up after themselves. I understand some people... Long time ago, not during the time I stayed. Some people suicided there. Yeah because some people they stay a long time. <Clock begins to chime loudly in background> You know some people, some of the older people especially. Uh you know maybe they don't have enough bribe

or or things that you know they kept on rejecting so they up as far as the supreme court to fight their cases to try to stay there. Some people who can't stay there and suicide. That why you saw all those poems. Some poems are pretty sad. Yeah.

A: Do you remember reading about those poems?

D: Yeah I read about the poems. But I don't remember any of them now. But except many of them still there.

A: How did you feel about people killing themselves?

D: Uh, well, we don't think about it too much because we were young. Just heard about it. Didn't see it; I just heard about it. I wasn't scared because there were so many people around. So <laughs> yeah.

A: You didn't know any one personally?

D: No no, I didn't know anyone. Course not. Uh...quite some time ago before I arrived.

A: What stands out the most in your memory about where you lived? The big room with 150 people?

D: I don't know since I was young uh...I don't suffer too much. And sometimes it fun too because so many people. Just having fun that's all not like the older people who suffered a little bit more you know.

A: what did you do to help those people? Did you do anything for those who were suffering or not feeling good.

D: Uh no, I didn't notice their suffering. but they suffered mental, not happy of course. Because you are...stay there in a confine space like prison. And uh not much you can do about it. You don't have any entertainment. Its just people talk and mingle around. And then that's about it and uh, and uh that's...just like a dormitory. <laughs? Not as good as a dormitory.

A: Could you describe the people with how you stayed? Like how old were they, were they from the same area in china?

D: Yeah most of them from South southern part of china from Guandong, uh...most of them are farmers children and all ages. Japanese stayed a little better. The Japanese on Angel Island I guess ...they were quartered on the right hand side. We were in section left. I think they had 3 or 4 people in one room.

A: Did they sleep in the same room size?

D: No...that I don't know. This is what I heard. They got better treatment. Because they don't have that many people any ways. Not like China. China, they come by the hundreds. Japanese

they come by 30-40 something. But but any way it seems clear that they were a powerful nation too I think <laughs>. They got better treatment than we do.

A: Could you tell me about what your daily schedule was like? What time did you wake up? What did you do?

D: Uh well, we wake up around 7, 7:30 and we had breakfast, we had three meals a day. Which was pretty decent. They call us and we go to the mess hall. And the guy, the guy <ahem> calls us it's a big guy, maybe 50 years old, every time he used Chinese "SIC FAN!" <laughs>

A: Sounds so harsh! <moved recorder>

D: Yeah yeah ...nono...they take care of us. They sympathize with us too. <ahem> well at least that particular guy.

A: Well you mentioned seeing poetry on the wall. Did you see anyone write on the wall?

D: Um no. no not during the time that was there. By the time I was there, the wall was pretty full there anyways. <laughter> a lot of poetry.

A: When I went there there was some beautiful carvings and writings

D: Yes!

A: And then lower on the wall there was some hand writing that was so pretty...

D: <Adds> yeah which could have meant that kids did it. Could be could be, I don't know. I didn't write anything. Most of those probably 5-10 years before I got there. Yeah so so maybe the conditions were worse than. I don' know.

A: Oh that's interesting. That it could have gotten better over time.

D: Could could be. I have no way of knowing.

A: Did you see anyone catching coaching notes? When there were people getting ready to interview, and they didn't study..?

D: No, uh I think most people throw away, already most people memorized them, you know they ask all kinds of Questions. How was your house orientated.

A: How many windows

D: What...how many windows, where was you kitchen, you have a kitchen god or not, you have a living room, room orientation. How does your village looks, where is your house, and what's the streets. You don't know what they ask. Because they ask you and then they ask because they

ask you and then they ask your phony father. So if the two doesn't match then they kick you out that is why they ...yeah.

A: Can you describe you interrogation process? How long did you have to wait before they called you in? and did they treat you nicely? Do you remember any of their questions?

D: Uh no, actually I don't remember anything now. But as I said. The interview was only 15-20minutes. In my case. And uh they treat us ok.

A: And they held you...

D: Just uh...sit in the front of the desk. And I sit right here <gesturing> and he...he just asking questions. And there isn't interpreter too. And the interpreter is a goes to the room too. So.

A: How did you feel about the interrogation process, did you feel like they were discriminating against you?

D: Uh no I don't think so. Not in my case at that time. I don't fee like they were harsh or anything. They asked me orderly point and I don't recall any really negative personal interview.

A: And the last part, after detention; what effect would you say the experience has had on you?

D: As I said, uh, I know uh, I was young and I don't really uh really uh...uh experience and deep impression because uh you know...there wasn't really that harsh. In reality, it's not that comfortable. But you don't really uh feel like you are being punished or anything. In my case. I say the older person probably a little more sensitive.

A: Why do you think the older people are more sensitive? Is it because they work so hard and they were lied to?

D: Yeah yeah yeah I think so; they are really conscientious too.

A: And where and with who did you go to/ with after you left Angel Island?

D: Well actually my father is still working in Oakland so my phony father greeted me at the pier. And uh surprisingly he just told me how to go and I just get on the train. They used to have a train goes to uh the bridge and go to Oakland to get there. And boom, like that. My father was waiting for me on the street. So I had this uh piece of paper said which and I just gave it to the conductor and I uh that's what I did. And I got off okay.

A: After the uh Angel Island process did you still talk to your phony dad?

D: Uh no. after that uh, I think...after 6-7 months he went back to China. He retired. Yeah.

A: what about your family now and your work?

D: Of course I am retired now. I have three children and seven grandchildren. So my wife just went out shopping. She should be back anytime I guess. I consider myself really fortunate. Of course we all work hard.

A: Did you go back to school after you left Angel Island, it says you are an engineer.

D: No no, after Angel Island and I went to uh actually went to school with small children. My English wasn't so good then. I was 17, I was ...uh, 6- 7th graders. Of course we were all in different rooms. Because we are all immigrants...

A: Immersions classes.

D: Yeah immersion classes. And then after that I graduate from grade school and went up to high school. High school about a year and then the war. The US got into WWII and I went to work for a ship yard.

A: In Oakland?

D: No in san Francisco. In a ship yard, Western Pipe, company called Western Pipe. So uh actually uh I worked there for about a year. And it seemed they drafted me around 19. I was 19 at that time and I wasn't finished with high school and that time the war was pretty hard that is why they really need people. I was under weight, they still got me any way. They have different classifications you know—classify how fit you are to get into the army. I consider 4F. so anyways after a month of basic training, they shipped over sea. They send me to CPI, which is China, Burma, India. So uh, we uh, we uh as I said we had basic training in camp one. Which is in Oregon and then shipped us over sea on a boat. And the boat tat the time it took almost 30days to India because German submarine powerful at the period. Its what they called a "U 2". So our chip is a commercial ship. which is converted from a cruise ship. Converted into a transport ship. The ship ordinary 2,000 people, but we had 8,000 soldiers.

A: Was that boat ride hared than the angel island boat ride?

D: Yeah, oh yeah. Much crowdedier. Crowdedier. And the ship had to go along the coast because they ...submarine, and then not only that. They had to go to one port and then turn around and go some place else and then go around. And that's why it took so long to go to India. Almost a month. So anyways its pretty rough. Pretty rough. Not enough water and uh at that time German general "Ra-monoh"* he is one of the well most known in Africa. Which is the allies really in defeat. At that time the war was really unclear. They send up to china because our unit consists half and half. Half white uh half Chinese. Originally they were going to train us to be uh what they called "OSS", which is uh ships you back to inland China to be spies. And that...after that they changed. They assigned me to medical. I was in field hospital. Field hospital. I was in field hospital. 22nd hospital which is uh, we don't work very close. Most of the time make it 20-30 mile behind. But any way its uh, it took us a long time to get to India. And we stayed in India for a couple months. And then they fled us all over China. Which is what they called the "hump". The hump which is the mountain. The mountain range between the Choondun Mountains in china and India. Which is pretty dangerous and uh, you know they have uh, this uh

US army and uh 30 soldiers all stations in India. The British, US, and the Chinese. And uh, and uh they had to ship us separately little by little so the first city we went to was Kuming. Which is uh Yunan Province at that time, it uh the Japanese pushing inward. They got the coast already. The whole coast. And that was where the Flying Tiger was too. The Famous Flying Tiger? That goes between there?

A: Going back to the detention, did you have any problems thinking about “Should I go back to Angel Island to visit?” or did you just want to go?

D: Uh no, <laughs> I didn’t go to Angel Island until uh, uh, 10- 15 years ago. About that time. And b/c at that time, not much to it. Uh I don’t’ think they...they at that time, they were even open to the public yet. I think they only open it to the public 15- 20 years ago.

A: They...they’re are going to close it down to renovate or remodel.

D: Yeah yeah so now, I think uh people will chip in their money and so ...go change something back there. Yeah.

A: Did you ever think about your phony identity? What was your phony identity’s name?

D: Uh called Duck, d-u-c-k, Jeong and then , and then when I went to school with uh children, the kids. Ina special class. And then the teacher, Sheraton. Mrs. Sheraton she said “Duck doesn’t sound that good, I’ll change one letter.” Changed to D-i-c-k instead of d-u-c-k is just d-i-c-k. Long since then I am Dick, d-i-c-k. more than Duck.

A: What is your real last name. how do you spell it?

D: Same last name actually. Same last name.

A: Oh so your phony father has the same last name right?

D: Yeah, same last name. Lotta people not.

A: Right

D: Yeah. Most most people don’t. it just so happens they found one that has the same last name.

A: What was your birth name?

D: Bak-Ho...that is Chinese name. Yeah. Can we uh conclude this interview?

A: Yeah okay no problem.

*Field Marshal Erwin Rommel (1891-1944) Rommel joined the army in 1909, became an officer a year later and was noticed in WWI for his brilliant tactics, for which he received Germany's highest medal. After the war he became a military instructor and author. He saw Hitler's rise to power as a means to expand Germany's military and when war broke out, his 7th Panzer division took part in the French campaign. He was then sent to North Africa to halt the British advance, but his deadly Afrika Korps was eventually overpowered by the superior numbers of the British and Americans. He was briefly dismissed but later made a subordinate of Rundstedt in France and was in charge of the defenses from a western invasion. After a series of defeats in France he became frustrated with Hitler and conspired against him in the failed assassination of 1944. Rather than face trial, he committed suicide. Rommel was a genius of military tactics as well as an honorable soldier, but it can't be denied that he was exploited by Nazi propaganda and his reputation was somewhat inflated. While he was admired by his country and his enemies, the soldiers he commanded knew him as an impersonal, rigid and stubborn man. Still, he had the talent, vision and courage to inspire his men and his name will remain legendary in military history.