

MAY 8 - 1968

Dear Mrs. Hiatt:

I am very glad to respond to your letter of April 19 to the Office of Territories, with which you enclosed Pacific Journal clippings concerning the recent Typhoon in the Northern Marianas.

On April 17, news articles appeared in both the Pacific Journal and the Guam Daily News, and an editorial also appeared in the Journal, severely criticizing officials of the Trust Territory Government for their alleged lack of leadership immediately after the typhoon. We disagree strongly with these articles and editorial comments and I welcome this opportunity to tell you why.

Among the serious charges, and our responses to them, are these:

1. The articles and the editorial state that there was no command center, that no one official was in charge, and that governmental officials went home to wait out the storm there.

There was a command center, in the area of the District Administration buildings, and such command center was manned by the District Administrator and his principal assistants at all hours throughout the typhoon (on the evening of April 11 and the early morning of April 12) and on a 24-hour-a-day basis for several days thereafter. Principal responsibility for pre-typhoon and post-typhoon activity was placed in the District Administrator, as has always been the case in Trust Territory typhoons. The District Administrator was well aware of that fact, and he discharged his responsibilities efficiently and tirelessly. As he knew, Trust Territory Headquarters personnel stood ready to respond to his needs, and they did so before, during, and after the storm.

At 8 a.m. on Friday, April 12, within a few hours of the storm's abatement, the District Administrator held his first post-typhoon staff meeting, to assemble as many facts as possible, to assess immediate needs, and to establish priorities. It had earlier been agreed that immediately following such District staff meeting, the District Administrator would come to the Headquarters building, there to meet with the High Commissioner and his staff, in order to advise them of those areas in which the District needed assistance from Headquarters. This occurred at 10 a.m. on the morning of Friday, April 12. A further meeting of the same group, plus Red Cross representatives

and our Director of the Office of Territories who had by then arrived, occurred at 4 p.m. the same day. Further meetings of the above group, with additions from the military and the Office of Emergency Planning, occurred at 10 a.m. on Easter Sunday morning, at 10 a.m. the following Tuesday, and thereafter.

Our Director of the Office of Territories was correctly quoted, by the San Daily News for April 15, as having said that, "words expressed at one meeting were met by the time of the next meeting." This, of course, was the function of the gatherings referred to above, and of many others that need not now be detailed. Those individuals with areas of principal responsibility, notably the District Administrator, expressed the areas of their concern, and decisions were made as to who would respond and in what manner.

It is quite true that not all officials of either the Headquarters or District Administration joined in naming the command post. Some indeed spent the hours of the storm in their own houses. There is little one can do during the height of a typhoon after electrical power has failed but to weather it as best one can, and then be prepared to cope with the aftermath. Others, particularly public works personnel, remained at their posts of duty almost until such posts were blown away (as they ultimately were). When the Guam delegation arrived, they did find the High Commissioner at home, this immediately following lunch on Saturday (not Monday, as the editorial states). Lunch was not available elsewhere in Saipan on that day, nor for many days thereafter.

2. The articles state that the military efforts to be of assistance were thwarted by insufficient and tardy requests from the Trust Territory Government, and by a failure to distribute military supplies efficiently. They further state that offers of assistance from Guam were not acted upon expeditiously and that Guam workers thus were forced to "take matters into their own hands."

We doubt that the military has expressed any adverse views on the adequacy or timeliness of Trust Territory requests for assistance. We know of none, even though we have sought, without success, to discover any that may exist. In any event, certainly the military response to Trust Territory requests for assistance, ranging from field kitchens to serve 10,000 to boats to pull a Trust Territory vessel off the reef, was prompt and generous. But it is certainly also true that not all requests for assistance were made forthwith, after the disaster, because a genuine effort was made only to request help in areas of genuine need. It would not, for example, have been helpful to obtain portable generators incapable of being attached to power equipment on the islands in question. But when needs had been reasonably well assessed, they were promptly made known, and without fail those able to respond (including the military and the Red Cross, as well as the Government of Guam) did so with speed and efficiency. Not all gratuitous assistance was helpful, however, for it was sometimes duplicative. Some offers of help, for that reason, were not accepted.

3. It has been stated that, notwithstanding the needs of Tinian, the offer by Guam representatives to send medical personnel there was declined. The contrary is true.

On Sunday, April 14, the Assistant Commissioner stated that it would be helpful if a doctor and nurse could be sent from Guam to assist in inoculating the population against typhoid and tetanus. The team arrived that afternoon, and on the following day conducted a clinic in Chalon Ranco, the principal population center. The following day the Assistant Commissioner dispatched the team to Tinian, there to perform inoculations of the island's population, as well as to administer to health needs generally. In the evening of Tuesday, April 16, the Assistant Commissioner received a message from Guam, asking whether medical services for Tinian were required. He proceeded to the building at which the Guam team was quartered and learned from them that they had completed the inoculations and other medical services on Tinian that day. Thereupon he replied to Guam stating that such medical assistance would not be needed on Tinian. It is the foregoing situation which apparently resulted in the extraordinarily misleading statement, quoted in the Pacific Journal, that "Trust Territory officials knew the Tinian people would want a doctor, but they declined a doctor for Tinian."

4. The articles complain that concern for Tinian and the island North of Saipan was insufficient.

We would agree that earlier visits to and assessments of Tinian ought to have been undertaken. We do not know why they were not, and can only assume that in the immediate post-typhoon hours, this serious oversight occurred as the result of numerous other pressures. It is regrettable that the 600 people on Tinian had to wait for relief, but 15,000 people on Saipan were in equal need, and all available immediate relief was used up by them. Efforts were made to reach Tinian, by both sea and air, on Friday, April 13, but they were unsuccessful. The weather precluded such travel.

On Sunday morning, April 14, the island was first visited, and the Deputy High Commissioner arrived that afternoon. As I have noted, we can establish no reason why a visit was not paid on Saturday. Nevertheless, Tinian was, by early in the following week, receiving as full attention and as full assistance as was Saipan.

The difficulties of reaching the northern islands are always great, and made particularly so when weather is inclement and airplanes are in heavy demand for more populous areas. Nevertheless, such islands have long since been visited now, and the needs of the people on those islands are being met as fully as elsewhere in the Marianas.

5. Lastly, I would advert to the statement that requests for aid come "directly from the people, rather than from Trust Territory officials." This is not true.

The typhoon diminished toward the dawn of April 17. Shortly after dawn the first emergency power patch was completed for the radio communications operation, and thereafter the Deputy High Commissioner was able to establish contact personally with Admiral Carlton James, Commander of the Naval Forces in the Marianas at Guam. The first known needs for relief were stated at that time. Within two hours the Commonwealth's chief operations officer, Captain Joseph Reddie, landed the first plane on Saipan, made his own appraisal, immediately radioed for all-out help, received an immediate pledge of unlimited assistance from Admiral U. S. Sharp (CINCPAC), and there was launched what the military has described as the biggest airlift in the Pacific since World War II. By Sunday planes had arrived with hundreds of tons of supplies from Hawaii, Guam, Japan, Korea, and Taiwan.

That requests for help "from the people" were received during the days the officials from Guam visited Saipan and Tinian is hardly surprising. The people of Saipan, Tinian, and the northern islands had suffered in a most egregious way, and we should doubt that any people in that situation would be free of complaints or of requests for assistance. That they added complaints about the performance of their governmental officials also we cannot doubt, but we do question the wisdom of judging the governmental performance on that basis.

This Department is entirely satisfied with the performance of its employees in the Trust Territory during Typhoon Joan. On the basis of all we know, and all our representatives have seen, we regard the performance as energetic, imaginative, coordinated, and creditable.

Sincerely yours,

(Sgd.) Harry R. Anderson

Assistant Secretary of the Interior

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