

Marianas  
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# "ORPHAN" ISLES SEEK TO JOIN U.S.

## SAIPAN

A mountainous chain of islands where some of the bloodiest battles of the Pacific were fought in World War II is now heading toward union with the U. S.

Negotiations are scheduled to start here in a few weeks on a proposal by the Mariana Islands for a "close and permanent affiliation with the United States."

The area of 14 main isles—not including nearby Guam, which has been a part of the U. S. for decades—wants to break off from the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands of which it is now a part. The Trust Territory, known as Micronesia, is governed by the U. S. for the United Nations, but five of the six Micronesian districts are seeking a more independent status.

The Marianas, however, want to strengthen, not loosen, their ties with America. Islanders say their relationships have generally been warm with the hundreds of American administrators, teachers and servicemen who have lived here on and off since the region was captured from the Japanese in 1944. Most youngsters here have been taught in U. S.-style schools by American as well as Micronesian teachers, and "Americanization" of the islands extends all the way from breakfast foods to basketball.

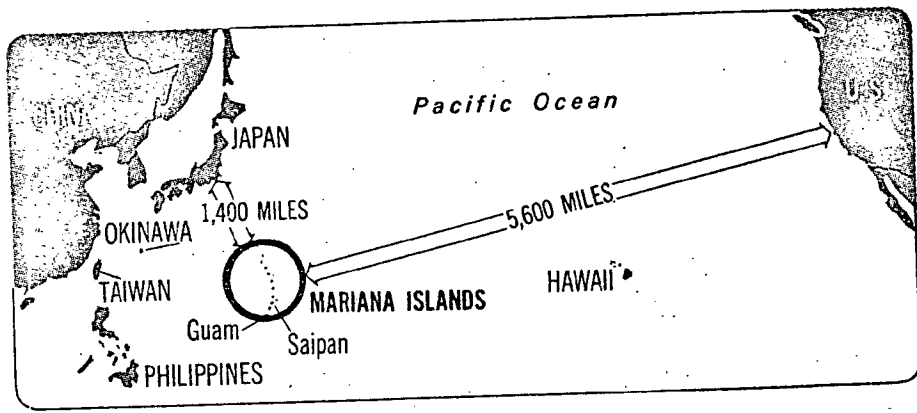
**Islanders' desire.** Says Edward deLGPangelman, Chairman of the Marianas Political Status Commission:

"After a quarter century of American administration, our people have come to know and appreciate the American system of government. . . . We desire a close political union with the United States of America—a membership in the United States political family."

The exact form of union has not been determined, but may be modeled on territory or commonwealth status. One of the principal concerns is ownership of land, which islanders want restricted to themselves. Many fear that full U. S. citizenship would open up their limited acreage to development by outsiders.

If approved, the union would be the first major addition of territory to the United States in about a half century.

The area took its first big step toward joining the United States in 1969, when nearly 3,200 resi-



dents voted for an American identity, and only 25 opposed such action. The district's total population today is about 13,000.

In 1972, the region's elected officials notified the Congress of Micronesia of their intention to seek a union with America. In a letter to the U. S. Government, the Marianas group declared:

"We pledge to you and your Government our loyalty and dedication to the principles for which America stands, and further, we stand ready to accept the responsibilities of the freedom that the United States guarantees and defends."

Older islanders remember the relatively harsh regime of the Japanese, who ran Micronesia between the two world wars with little regard for local self-determination. Germany and Spain had controlled the region before them.

Even before World War II, links between the Marianas and the U. S. were being forged through close connections between the islanders and their racial and cultural cousins on Guam. The ties became much stronger after the war as Guam emerged as the region's commercial and transportation center.

For a while, a few leaders explored

the possibility of an association with Guam, but Guamanian voters turned down the idea and it has not been revived with much enthusiasm.

**Jobs and money.** Some employees of the Trust Territory Government, which has headquarters here, fear they will lose their jobs if and when the Micronesian capital is moved. Others believe that an expected infusion of grants and investments from the U. S. will more than make up for possible losses.

Tourists—mainly from Japan—already have brought new vigor to the economy. Modern hotels are springing up on the golden beaches where thousands of Americans stormed ashore from landing ships. Rusting tanks still are bathed by the surf, and old pillboxes, cables and other wartime debris are scattered along the palm-lined strand between swimming pools and park lands.

A group of islanders also predicts a boom in employment resulting from construction and operation of U. S. military bases under plans now being considered by the Pentagon. The Defense Department is studying the possibility of building a port and one or two airfields at a cost of hundreds of millions of dollars.

The bases would house U. S. forces in case of eviction from other Pacific strongholds such as the Philippines, Okinawa and Japan. According to tentative plans, the Marianas—along with Guam—would become America's main outpost in the Western Pacific.

Negotiators say that union could be accomplished as early as 1974 if all hurdles are removed—in the Marianas legislature, the U. S. Congress, the United Nations, and a plebiscite of the island people.



Children in the Marianas have been taught in American-style schools since World War II, adding to area's ties with U. S.