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Remember Saipan? They Want It Back

BY DON OBERDORFER
Washington Post Service

TINIAN, Mariana Islands — At 2:45 a.m. on Aug. 6, 1945, the B-29 bomber "Enola Gay" lifted off the runway of North Field at the end of this island bearing a single 14-foot projectile which would level the entire Japanese city of Hiroshima, killing 70,000 with a single blinding flash and mushroom cloud. That mission virtually ended World War II and initiated the nuclear age.

For more than two decades the long coral-and-asphalt runways at North Field have lain silent and abandoned, save for an occasional handful of tourists, a few wheeling and screeching tropical birds and the slowly encroaching lushness of a thick green jungle plant known here in the Pacific as tanger-tenger.

The rest of this natural island fortress jutting out of the sea has been almost as quiet. After the 40,000 American troops went home and their tent and quonset cities were dismantled, Tinian was left to a few hundred Chamorro natives and a few thousand head of cattle.

NOW, FOR the first time since the days of its might and fame, the pace is beginning to quicken.

In recent months a procession of U.S. military men materialized, usually unannounced and sometimes in civilian garb, to inspect the dust-blown runways, the 50 miles of paved roads and the silt-choked harbor.

A big and well-connected Honolulu firm is suddenly bidding to reopen the old military quarry which once yielded a bountiful flow of construction materials. Standard Oil of California has made known plans to build a \$20 million oil refinery more suited to the needs of powerful warships and heavy bombers than to the piddling demands of Tinian's 100 antique jeeps and weatherbeaten cars.

A retired admiral and a Madison Avenue management consultant recently swooped down without warning to study the island for a California firm specializing in housekeeping and maintenance contracts for the U.S. military. Another military survey team, led by a general officer, is expected soon.

UNDER a Pentagon plan to estab-

lish a post-Vietnam fallback defense line in Micronesia — the enormous mid-Pacific Ocean domain which the U.S. has ruled as "trustee" for the United Nations since World War II — Tinian is slated to become a joint Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps air base and naval facility.

But just as the sun-drenched surface of Tinian and the other 2,140 trustee islands are only the tip of volcanic mountains and coral formations rising from the ocean floor, so the Pentagon's plans reflect only the most easily perceived aspect of difficult and complex maneuvering concerning the future relationship of the United States and its Micronesian wards.

After more than three years of preliminary bargaining U.S.-Micronesian "future political status" negotiations appear to be approaching a critical point.

The U.S. government, which has been adamant until now about maintaining complete military control over this vast coconut-and-coral empire, has met growing resistance from island leaders who have taken to heart American-taught concepts of political freedom and self-determination. Sentiment for outright independence from the U.S. — which was unthinkable to Micronesians a few years ago and is still unthinkable to many American military planners — has taken root and is growing rapidly. In a variety of ways, the time for decision is fast approaching.

THE DAYS of United Nations trusteeships are numbered. Of 11 such mandates at the end of World War II, only two remain today. Australia's trusteeship over the islands of Papua-New Guinea is scheduled to be terminated next year, leaving the U.S.A.'s Micronesian trust territory the only such colonial domain under U.S. supervision anywhere — until an American-Micronesian agreement is reached to dissolve the mandate.

THE MARIANA Islands group, including Saipan and Tinian, has virtually succeeded from the main negotiations over Micronesia's future in hopes of striking an attractive separate deal with the United States. The Mariana

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—Photos Courtesy of U.S. Department of the Interior
Scenes of Micronesian
At right is a man's house on the island of Yap. Round stone is ancient coin. Below, Micronesian women share food in the shade of tropical trees.



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Islands

Tinian's Willing, But Not the Other

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Islanders have hired the Washington law firm of Wilmer, Cutler and Pickering as well as a group of Washington economic consultants, and are likely to drive a hard bargain. U.S.-Marianas talks are due to get down to business on Saipan in late March or early April.

● **THE MAIN** American-Micronesian discussions have temporarily bogged down because of the islanders' insistence that they be permitted to opt for independence should the terms of a proposed limited-sovereignty deal with the U.S. seem unacceptable. Micronesia is asking \$100 million per year in American aid in return for continued U.S. military and diplomatic control of their area after the end of the U.N. trusteeship. Micronesia has hired Paul Warnke, former assistant secretary of defense and Washington law partner of Clark Clifford, as adviser in the main negotiations, which are expected to resume in May.

● **IN LATE MAY** or early June the U.N. Trusteeship Council will begin its annual public debate on the United States performance of its responsibilities in Micronesia. This year for the first time the United Nations inspection team, which is currently traveling in the strategic area, includes a Soviet diplomat.

Moreover, the team has been accompanied on part of its journey through Micronesia by the highest ranking Chinese official at the United Nations — Tang Ming-Chao, U.N. undersecretary-general for trusteeship and decolonization affairs. Micronesian Sen. Andon Amaraich, who sharply criticized the N.S. administration in last year's debate and declared that "the vast majority of the people of Micronesia does not want and has no use for the United States military," is preparing to travel to New York as an official Micronesian spokesman again this summer.

HOW THE United States with its anti-colonial tradition came to be virtually the last U.N. colonial administrator is a curious and tangled tale. As has often been said, it is a historical accident. In the perspective of today, it is also fast becoming a political nightmare.

The Trust Territory of Micronesia — the land of tiny islands — contains only 110,000 people on a total of 700 square miles of land strewn out in picturesque chunks over 3 million square miles of the western Pacific, roughly the size of the land area of the continental United States.

Micronesia is actually made up of three distinct archipelagos — from east to west, the Marshalls, the Carolines and the Marianas — with a total of nine distinct languages and a variety of cultural patterns and historical experiences. Because of its diversity and the

extreme distances over open water, Micronesia previously has been more a geographical description than anything approaching a nation. This is one of its most serious problems today.

Discovered by Ferdinand Magellan and other European explorers of the 16th Century — when the islanders of various groups already had well-developed local cultures — Micronesia fell under the successive colonial claims and political and economic domination of Spain, Germany and Japan (except for the island of Guam, which was annexed by the U.S. The industrious, land-short Japanese, who seized Micronesia from Germany in World War I and kept the area under a post-war League of Nations mandate, extensively developed many of the closest and most productive islands to produce sugar, fish, copra and other raw materials and, as World War II approached, turned the island empire into a bristling strategic fortress.

THE VAST western Pacific area between Hawaii and the Philippines was recognized as strategically important, and in World War II the United States fought its way through Kwajalein and Eniwetok, Saipan and Tinian, Peleliu and Angaur at a cost of 6,238 Americans killed in island battles to vanquish the Japanese. Wave after wave of B-29s flying almost around the clock bombed Tokyo and other Japanese targets from the Saipan and Tinian airfields before the "Enola Gay" — and a

sister place which destroyed much of Nagasaki three days later — ended the war with atomic bombs launched from Tinian's North Field.

After V-J Day the U.S. military argued for annexation of Micronesia to assure continued American control of the western Pacific, but the proposal flew in the face of wartime pledges that the Americans had no territorial ambitions. The compromise result, made in Washington, was a special United Nations "strategic trusteeship" under the control of the Security Council (where the U.S. has a veto).

The U.S. was given the right to establish military bases in the area and pledged in return to promote economic advancement and eventual "self-government or independence." Actually, the United States had no idea of promoting independence. The phrase was added to the trusteeship agreement at the behest of the Soviet Union.

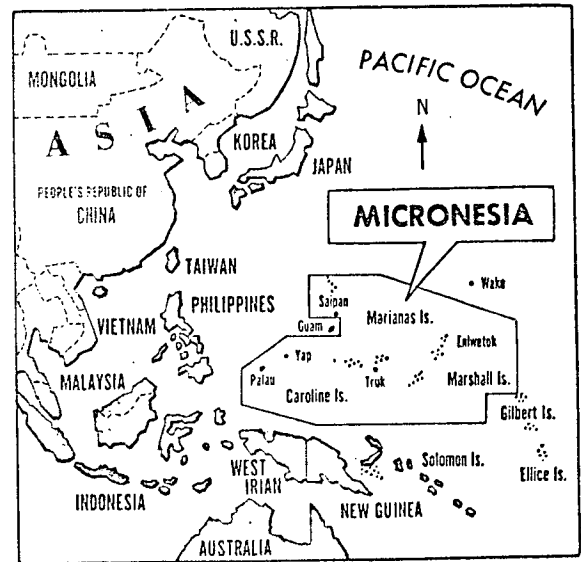
The U.S. established nuclear testing grounds and later a highly sophisticated missile testing area centered on Kwajalein in the Marshall Islands. Moving thousands of natives off their land with minimal or no compensation and detonating 93 atomic and hydrogen bombs at Bikini and Eniwetok between 1946 and 1958. On Saipan the Central Intelligence Agency built a modern and expensive headquarters (later inherited by the Trust Territory Administration) and a secret training base for Nationalist Chinese guerrillas assigned to raid mainland China.

OUTSIDE these American enclaves, most of the rest of Micronesia was left to molder by a succession of Navy and Interior Department administrators. For more than a decade this vast area was closed off to the world behind a nearly impenetrable security screen.

With other colonial areas gaining independence and time running out on the trusteeship system, President Kennedy signed a secret National Security Council memorandum in April, 1962, ordering "accelerated development" of the area as part of a plan to terminate the U.N. mandate and bring Micronesia permanently under U.S. control. The following year a presidential survey mission refined the plans, which called for extensive educational, political and economic development peaking in 1967 or 1968 — when the islanders would be asked to vote in a plebiscite on the question of their future affiliation.

Had the timetable been kept, everything might have worked as planned — but a slow-moving bureaucracy in Washington had difficulty deciding the details, and in 1967 and 1968 a balky U.S. refused to pass a presidentially-sponsored resolution paving the way for the Micronesian vote. Thus it was the fall of 1969 before negotiations began with the increasingly wary representatives of the Micronesian congress, which had been established four years before.

AT THE BEGINNING the United States offered to make Micronesia an



—Herald Map by FRANK OREGO

America's Trust Territory of Micronesia
... consists of three distinct archipelagos

American territory similar to Guam or the Virgin Islands. This was quickly rejected by the Micronesian side. Then the discussion centered on a plan known as "free association," in which the United States would maintain military and diplomatic sway and the Micronesians would be granted a measure of internal self-government and control. It sounded acceptable at the beginning, but as details unfolded, the ticking points emerged on the Micronesian side.

● **FIRST**, the islanders insist on the right to terminate the "free association" arrangement after five years or so and opt for independence should they choose. According to Micronesian sources, the United States proposes at least 15 or 20 years of "free association" and even then would bind the island by a prior security pact continuing American military base rights and the right to keep other foreign powers out.

"We're not ready for independence today, but given some five or ten years of 'free association,' I think we would be ready," said Sen. Lazarus Salii, the 36-year-old chairman of the Micronesian negotiating team. In his view, the movement toward independence began gathering momentum last summer when the islanders began to discover the details of the U.S. terms — until then, it had not generally been considered a feasible possibility.

"Nobody is saying it would not be

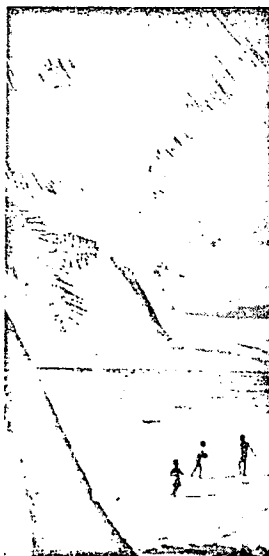
hard. Certainly it would be. But under independence nobody would starve here. There is food and shelter. It's really a question of greater security, financial and otherwise, or of greater independence from foreign domination," he said.

● **SECOND**, the U.S. appears intent on paying a relatively modest price in dollars for the rights it seeks to maintain. American negotiators have told the islanders that the \$100 million per year they suggested is too high.

As the negotiations have bogged down, the U.S. has ordered substantial cuts in the existing \$60 million annual budget for the islands. American administrators insist this is a routine budgetary cutback due to government-wide trends. To the islanders it looks suspiciously like economic pressure.

● **THIRD** and perhaps most important as an immediate issue, the Micronesians continue to be worried about future American military control of their scarce land resources. They are infuriated by past and present U.S. failure to hand back the many thousands of acres seized by the Germans and Japanese.

Possibly because there is so little of it, land is dearer to Micronesians than most Americans could ever imagine. In Yap, for example, even a person's name is derived from the name of the piece of land which he and his family possess.



Beautiful Beach
... on Majuro Island

OVER RECENT months the U.S. has outlined the military areas which it plans to use under "free association" — the present U.S. testing sites in the Kwajalein atoll in the Marshall Islands; the proposed joint air and naval base on Tinian and support facilities on nearby Saipan in the Mariana Islands; the right to establish port facilities, a jet airport and a large military maneuvers area at Palau in the eastern Carolines.

The traditional chiefs and elected leaders of Palau have declared themselves "unequivocally opposed" to the use of their land by the military and have refused even to permit a survey team to come for a look.

It is a different story on Tinian, where only 937 people live on 39 square miles of available land. Most Tinian leaders are eager to see American troops return, believing that they will bring with them a high school, a hospital and above all a measure of prosperity which the island now lacks.

Mayor Antonio Borja has written to the U.S. Secretary of Defense welcoming the armed forces back to "their old home on Tinian" and incidentally offering to rent them some housing and refrigeration facilities he has in mind. Former Mayor Joe Cruz, who points out that the U.S. Department of Defense is "the biggest money spender in the world," has already picked four sites for the night clubs he intends to establish when the GIs come.

He is also planning a modern motel to augment the existing Tinian Hotel, a World War II relic which served as Gen. Curtis Lemay's headquarters in 1945. It has three guest rooms.

ALL THIS must wait, however, for the conclusion of the negotiations with the Mariana Islands and the broader talks with Micronesia as a whole.

Rep. Ataji Balos of the Marshalls, one of the more articulate of the voices demanding a better deal, told the recent session of the Micronesian congress that "as far as the Trust Territory goes, it is very clear to me that it is the Micronesians who have the territory." Given the gap between the U.S. official attitudes and the island leadership's aspiration for control of their lands and their destiny, it is clear that fundamental decisions for compromise or growing conflict must be taken soon.

For the first time since the Spanish ships appeared on the horizon centuries ago, the island peoples themselves are going to have a say about their masters, and they are insisting on some real choices that will give them a grip on the future.

For now, however, there is no break visible in the clouds over the future of the western Pacific. The likelihood is that opposition to U.S. plans will persist and grow unless the United States somehow shows a little more trust, and the Micronesians obtain more territory.