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Marianas II

Editorial

Tinian - Time Of Change

It's been called the Manhattan of the Marianas.

It's been called the "birthplace of the Atomic age"

Would you know that we're talking about tiny Tinian, the third largest of the Marianas islands—a community that has roughly 800 people, and a future that is at once bright, and obscure?

We're not used to tooting our own horn, but we think that the Daily News has done a credible public service in sending writer Ronn Ronck to Tinian for an in-depth study of that island. We carried a seven part series detailing what the island looks like, its history, its agriculture, its potential, and the feelings of the people.

When we call it the Manhattan of the Pacific, we're referring to its shape, which struck early U.S. military men as being remarkably similar to New York's Manhattan. In fact they even named the streets—some of which still exist—after those of New York. It gives one a bit of a start to think about riding down Broadway, in the midst of a tangantangan jungle.

The atomic age? Of course, it was from Tinian that the first B29s to carry the atomic bomb left for Japan, truly issuing another age into the world.

Tinian has a great deal of history, and apparently a great deal of future. Tinian was where Lord George Anson landed in 1747, after losing five of his six ships in a typhoon. Even before that it was home to some of the biggest and strongest Chamorros, judging from the size of the latte stones there.

A small island, only 12 miles long, and 6½ miles wide at its widest point, Tinian was once home to 150,000 army airmen, and their B52s.

Its future could go one of several ways. It could become a tourist attraction of sorts, although it appears that Guam and Saipan, with their mountains, and their headstart in hotel facilities, and infrastructure, have an advantage over Tinian. Too, Tinian has such a small population, 800, that tourism is not likely to develop except as a spin-off from congested areas, such as Guam and Saipan, even with gambling legalized there. In fact, we suspect that the District Administrator, Mr. Ada, would be inclined to blow the whistle if gambling on Tinian ever got out of the slot-machine category.

Tinian is showing signs, thanks to Micronesia Development Co., of turning into the major agricultural area of the entire Marianas. The largest present employer of Tinian, the MDC has a 20 year lease on some 7,500 acres of land. They are raising 4,000 head of cattle, and they run a good-sized piggery. Plans are to start a dairy herd. The island grows high quality fruits and vegetables, and in Japanese times was the scene of thousands of acres of sugar cane. Tinian could be, indeed, the garden isle of the Western Pacific.

Still, its greatest future might not be in any of these. It may be that after 28 years the U.S. military might return to the very island from which they launched the atomic age. The military retention land is large on Tinian—a big plus for them. The airstrips used for the big B-29s are basically pretty sound after all these years, another plus. And finally, and perhaps most important, the population of Tinian is small, and generally favorable to the idea of the U.S. military coming back. That situation doesn't exist in too many places around the world today, including such places as Palau.

For many years the military establishment, including Gen. Walt, head of the U.S. Marine Corps, have been taking a look-see at Tinian, discussing the use of the island. More recently, it has been the Air Force, looking for alternate landing fields from Guam, that has shown the most interest.

All this, obviously, ties in with the planned military fall-back from Okinawa, and other points in the Far East. There is no question that Tinian presents an attractive picture to the military, from the harbor that was once one of the best in the western Pacific, to the fact that land acquisition would be at a minimum.

Politically, we're not sure of the exact grounds the military would walk on in Tinian—nor do the people themselves know, nor does the people of the rest of the Marianas. It's all so vague and ill-defined. We're sure, that under the U.N. trusteeship agreement, that the U.S. would be allowed to "fortify the islands." Yet, we don't imagine that would stop the screams of anguish from Mainland China, the Soviet Union, and possibly even Japan.

But, how about four or five years from now? Would the military expend \$50 million or so to put in the necessary facilities, without knowing what kind of political future is in store for Tinian, or the Marianas?

As far as them moving back next week, or next month, we would say forget it. So far, despite all the talk, and all the visits, we have yet to see in any military budget a dime for Tinian's rehabilitation.

We think that having a base on Tinian would be a good thing for Guam. It is apparent that Guam was outflanked by the Japanese during the last war because Guam sat entirely by itself, surrounded on all sides by Japanese held islands. With Tinian as a strong base on our flank, Guam's position would be made that much more secure. Having a large base on Tinian would be to Guam's economic benefit as well. Guam would still be the headquarters, and the center for supply, communications, transportation, and logistics. There is a great possibility that Tinian would be day-time duty only, with the nights spent with their families on Guam. Rest and Recreation would be best served in the hotels and night spots and theaters of Guam, and nearby Saipan.

We found the story of Tinian, its history, its people, its future to be a fascinating one, and we're quite happy to congratulate Daily News staffer Ronn Ronck on his series, one that expressed many thought provoking ideas about the place where the Atomic age began. JCM