

DATELINE--Wednesday, May 16, 1973 13

U.S. ok's commonwealth for TT

SAIPAN--American machines of war still rest, half submerged, rusting under the blistering sun just inside the reef, reminders of an almost forgotten war. Three miles to the south lies Tinian, whose miles of runways introduced the world to the atomic age.

Yesterday, nearly three decades later, a top-level U.S. delegation began a second round of negotiations with Northern Marianas leaders aimed at achieving a commonwealth status for 13,000 islanders and at the same time fulfilling American defense interests in the Pacific.

The U.S. has already made known its intentions to concentrate its future military activities on Tinian with support facilities on nearby Saipan.

At the opening plenary session at the Royal Taga Hotel, built on a World War II invasion beach, Ambassador Franklin Haydn Williams told members of the Marianas Status Commission, TT government officials and local citizens that his delegation was confident that Marianas desires for political union can be realized under a commonwealth arrangement within the guidelines of the American constitution.

Reading from a prepared statement, Williams said:

"Initially your stated preference ran toward political union with the territory of Guam. Later your representatives supported the concept of commonwealth and the offer put forward by the U.S. to all of Micronesia in 1970. After a study of possible status alternatives you have informed us that commonwealth is now your preferred position. We want your choice to be representative of the wishes of your people. We are confident that your desire for political union can be realized under a commonwealth arrangement within the guidelines laid down by the American Constitution.

Expressing hope that preliminary understanding and possibly even tentative language of a draft agreement could be reached during the immediate talks, expected to last ten to 14 days, Williams said.

"At the same time we do not wish to rush you. We feel that it is most important that you and your constituents be given ample time and opportunity for careful and thoughtful consideration of all aspects of the status question."

"In every quarter and at every level the American government appreciated the aspirations of the people of the Marianas and welcomes the prospects of their membership in the American political family. As we move from ceremony and the preliminaries to the substance and the practical realities of framing an agreement I think it would be useful at the beginning to keep in mind the larger perspectives of Pacific and World Affairs. It should be remembered that the U.S. has certain legal responsibilities for the maintenance of peace and security in the Pacific Ocean and clear legal rights and powers to

enable it to carry out these responsibilities."

At the same time, Williams said, the United States has assumed certain obligations to the people of the Trust Territory--to promote their social, political and economic well-being and to provide them with an opportunity to choose their own political future.

"With respect to the latter," he continued, "the U.S. has encouraged political unity in the TT and sought to promote a common future political status for all of Micronesia." He emphasized this policy was "consistently followed" by the U.S. until last April when the decision was finally made to respond to the repeated requests of the Marianas District for separate status talks.

"It was not easy to make this exception" he declared. It was based on the long post World War II history of the desire of the people of the Marianas for political union--a desire that has been expressed over a period of 20 years to the United States, the United Nations and more recently to the Congress of Micronesia."

The Ambassador said the task now is to translate these expressed sentiments, the language of past resolutions and petitions, and the results of referenda "...into the precise language of agreement defining your future legal status within the American governmental system."

Congress of Micronesia Senator Edward DLG. Pangelinan, chairman of the Marianas Status Commission, also reading from a prepared statement told the American delegation that the Marianas was prepared to negotiate in good faith and "united in their determination to do what is best for the people of the Marianas."