

Analysis:

Irony For Guam

By John Walter
Daily News Managing Editor

There is substantial irony for Guam in the news that the American buildup in Tinian may be bigger than anybody knew.

Irony in some of the reasons people perceive the Tinian plan may have been developed.

Irony in the reaction it is getting here.

The Tinian move, it is suggested by people watching the military here, may in part represent a kind of rebuke to Guam, where, the argument goes, the military has been made to feel increasingly uncomfortable.

If you're going to fight us every step of the way (this argument would have the military saying), then we'll show you: We'll build our bigger base 100 miles away, and maybe even take our Commander there, and downgrade the importance of the forces on Guam.

The irony of that, of course, is that Guam has not fought the military every step of the way. For years and years, by most lights, it has been a receptive, cordial, and even bent-over-backward host, even if it had no choice about being a host. During the years of the Vietnam war, hundreds of Guamanian boys made good soldiers and the Guam community was almost always in support of the war effort. Any Mainland locale with a base as heavily involved in the war as Guam's bases were would have had a host of mean war protests; Guam only had two in all those years, and neither

of them amounted to anything at all.

It is only recently that Guam has shown much life in its anti-military or quasi-anti-military factions. Even then, many of those who oppose a project like the proposed Sella Bay ammunition wharf stress they don't have a beef with the military as such.

And the reaction?

Well, the reaction is intriguing. There were some around yesterday suggesting the military wanted to send up a "trial balloon" in all this - for one thing, as a warning to Guam that "this could happen."

And the view on Guam yesterday seemed to be that the message got through: Suddenly everybody seemed to be saying, Hey, wait, don't take your money elsewhere...

The irony of this reaction would be if in the end it had any effect on the outcome of the Sella Bay vote in the Legislature.

For there is the cloud of Sella Bay behind all this: Clearly an ammunition wharf could go in on Tinian if residents here put up too big a fuss. It is possible that Tinian, in fact, is the contingency plan that the Navy and GovGuam have been discussing all the while they've been denying having any contingency plan for a failure in the Sella Bay negotiations.

Suddenly, yesterday, people were thinking of all the dollars that might veer away from Guam if that ammunition pier goes 100 miles north....