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Tinian Attitudes Change Quickly

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One member of the audience, Isaac Palacios, mentioning published reports that the military would like the present San Jose Village relocated in the southeastern Marpo Valley, said that such a move would bring great hardships to the people. "I will agree to welcome the military for the sake of economic development but I will not agree to give them a major part of this island." He added his remarks by stating that "we are just a handful of men but we have enough to cause them some trouble."

The longest speech of the evening, and certainly the one most discussed after the meeting was over, was that delivered by Felipe Mendiola, speaker of the Tinian Municipal Council. Mendiola, who presided over the public meeting, stated that if the newspaper accounts are true, "it is our own fault that this has happened. We have said that we are 100 per cent in favor of the military. Let's tell everyone that this is not true." Mendiola said that he doesn't want the U.S. military to take over the present dock facility, the airstrip at West Field, or the land at San Jose Village. All these things, he made clear, would remain under control of the civilian government.

"We have to think about the coming generations," Mendiola continued, "and put our heads together to get the best results from the negotiations in Saipan that we can. Let us lastly give confidence to members of the Marianas Political Status Commission. They are presenting us well as is shown by the time and effort they

took in coming over to Tinian and discussing these matters with us."

"Tinian has the bad reputation," Mendiola told this writer on an earlier occasion, "of being the launching pad for the B-29's that dropped the atomic bombs on Japan. I think that this is enough service for any island to give the U.S. Armed Forces."

Mendiola, however, does not consider himself anti-military. He has a son in the U.S. Air Force and believes that a civilian-controlled military return would be beneficial to the island's economic development. What he does object to, though, is the tight security blanket that the military has thrown over their plans to reoccupy Tinian.

"It's all right for the military to come back," he continued, "if they can prove to us that our island is absolutely essential for the defense of the Pacific. But I want more than their word for it. There must be an agreement on the table by both sides with local citizens making a decision. It's one thing for the people to invite the military back, but we will never—and I mean never—be sat upon and told what we can and cannot do."

Much of the current discussion on Tinian, and it's going on wherever two or more residents are gathered together; revolves around the question of moving the present village of San Jose, which the Navy feels is too close to the island's only harbor, to another location. The area along Long Beach on Tinian's northwestern side has often been proposed as an alternative site. Long Beach is

one of the few good beaches on Tinian and has the added advantages of facing Saipan and receiving the coolest breeze on the island. This beach now, however, is being leased by Ken Jones and his Micronesian Development Corp., and special permission must be obtained by the local people before they can go there. This is probably just as well, though, because this once beautiful strip of sand is now covered with dung from the corporation's 4,000 head of cattle and the great amount of trash that regularly floats down from Saipan.

The location favored by the Department of Defense, however, is Marpo Valley. This 500-acre piece of land is good for farming but much of it is swampy and bordered by rocky hills. There is no sandy beach on the seaward side but instead the land meets ocean atop 200-foot cliffs.

"We are also concerned about the possibility of rapid-spreading disease in that area," states Rosalia Fleming, wife of business entrepreneur Al Fleming and a major landowner on the island. "It is a low area and gets very little breeze. The valley has rich volcanic soil but at times it can get hotter than an oven. Besides, we have been moving back and forth since

1948 and there's no desire to move now that we're just getting settled."

Actually, the Marpo Valley couldn't support the entire island's population even if the people wanted it to. There are approximately 500 acres in the area and 288 of those are private property. Of the rest, 100 acres are being used as a government farm, leaving about 120 acres available for government lease. If the area were to be used to ultimate potential, these 120 acres should be given to farmers and according to Frank Chong, Distad representative on Tinian, the minimum any farmer would insist upon is 12 acres.

So, if these remaining acres are to become farms, Marpo could take an additional 10 families.

But what about the houses in San Jose Village? There are currently 170 houses there that would have to be moved. Using the figure of 1,000 square meters per house—the standard size allotted for urban village homesteading—240 houses could be built in Marpo Valley. This doesn't include public utilities, roads, churches, schools, government offices and other essential community operations. Most important, it doesn't include a harbor.

"The main reason we moved San Jose Village to its present location in 1953 was to be close to the harbor," Freddy Hofschneider explained. I remember when we used to spend all day just going back and forth between the village and the harbor to check if the ships had arrived. Our people need a harbor and we need it close to the village."

Hofschneider, one of Tinian's leading citizens and the island's municipal judge, is very concerned about how a military return would affect young people on the island. "I believe the military should keep to the north end of the island and let us have the harbor and southern half. If we have to relocate our village anywhere else there's not going to be enough land to give to the next generation. Young people here are getting more and more interested in their island and we have to be able to give them land after they return from high school and college. Otherwise they'll stay on Guam or Saipan and this island of Tinian will never move forward an inch."

Another fear that Hofschneider has is that the Micronesian Development Corp., headed by Guam's Ken Jones, will be forced to take his 4,000 head of cattle elsewhere.

"If Ken Jones leaves this island," Hofschneider states, "a great opportunity for our people will be lost. He has given many of our young people jobs on his ranch and taught them the basic facts about farming and agricultural planning. He is also a valued friend. After the bad typhoon we had a few years back, there were quite a few people without food or supplies. Ken Jones saw that many of us were in trouble so he told us we could go into the stores and buy anything we needed and he would pay for it. That's something we're never going to forget."