

To Tinian

ASIAN FOCUS

US will take over control of Tinian

SAIPAN, Thurs. - The US government announced today it proposes to acquire two-thirds of the Pacific island of Tinian - launch site for second world war atomic bombing raids on Japan - for construction of a major new military base.

US Ambassador Haydn Williams, in a 20-minute radio address to the people of the US-administered Mariana Islands, said the base would include an airfield, harbour, supply and maintenance facilities and training grounds.

He gave no further details of the base, but the Pacific Daily News on the island of Guam said it would house 2,600 military and civilian personnel and would cover about 18,500 acres (8,950 hectares).

Tinian, with a population of nearly of 800, is part of the Marianas group in the Western Pacific. The Marianas form part of the Pacific Trust Territory which the US administers under a United Nations mandate.

Negotiations have been in progress for several years on ending this mandate, but the Marianas alone want to continue as an American possession. Agreement has already been reached in principle on a form of commonwealth status similar to Puerto Rico.

Tinian had a brief moment of fame when it was used to launch the US atomic bomb raids on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August, 1945. The runway is now overgrown.

VILLAGE

Ambassador Williams, who heads the US negotiating team to the status talks, said the rights of local residents would be protected when the military moved in. But the island's only village would be moved from its present location near the harbour to a nearby area.

The US proposal actually involves the takeover of the entire island, but about one-third will remain under civilian control.

Negotiations on the Marianas future are expected to be completed this week.

Guam, the largest island in the Marianas chain, is outside the present negotiations. It already houses several important American military bases.

With the addition of Tinian, 110 miles to the north, the Marianas are expected to become the major line of defence for the US in the Western Pacific. - Reuter