

Hee Mr Williams 9/13

Marianas to Become U.S. Commonwealth

By Lelf Erickson

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — The 14,000 residents of the Mariana Islands are taking steps to become U.S. citizens in a new American commonwealth 1,000 miles south of Tokyo and 5,000 miles west of San Francisco.

They want the Stars and Stripes to fly over a chain of 14 volcanic and coral islands that would be the first new territory acquired by the United States since the Virgin Islands were bought from Denmark in 1917.

The major Mariana Islands are Saipan and Tinian, bloody World War II battlegrounds. The B29 Enota Gay took off from Tinian to drop warfare's first atomic bomb on Hiroshima.

An agreement is expected to be signed in September for a plebiscite vote by the Mariana's people on the commonwealth plan, Ambassador F.H. Williams, chief U.S. negotiator on Micronesian political status since 1971, said in an interview.

Eventual union with Guam, southernmost of the Marianas and a major U.S. western Pacific base, is expected by political leaders in both Guam and the northern Marianas, Williams said. Guam has been a U.S. possession since 1898.

He said signing also is near for a different kind of compact covering the 2,000 islands in the Marshalls and the Carolines. They stretch across vast Pacific reaches from the Marshall atoll of Bikini to Palau, on the western end of the Carolines.

Bikini was the test site for the first U.S. hydrogen bomb in 1954.

Leaders of the 80,000 Micronesians living in the south seas area reject permanent ties with the United States. They prefer self government under so-called free association status.

The compact would assure economic support for the Micronesian people. But they will have the right eventually to choose full independence, or even association with another power such as Japan.

The key influence in the Marianas choice for U.S. commonwealth status is their racial kinship with Guamanians. The people of the northern Marianas want Guam's higher living standards and prosperity to spread to their islands.

The racially different Micronesian people of the Carolines and the Marshalls appear

to cling more stubbornly to their traditional south seas way of life. Their leaders say they don't want Western style progress to overwhelm their own style of self reliance.

All the islands of Micronesia — Marianas, Marshalls, and Carolines — now are in the Pacific trust territory, administered by the United States since 1947 under a United Nations trusteeship.

Most are low-lying, palm-covered land spits on coral reefs ringing deep blue harbors. Some are dead volcanic peaks shrouded by mist and jungle growth. Lagoons like Truk and Majuro, is to 40 miles across, provided safe anchorage for World War II battle fleets.

Williams, headquartered in San Francisco, said both agreements provide substantial U.S. financial support.

The United States would provide the Marianas \$13.5 million annually for seven years plus \$3 million a year in services.

The government of Micronesia will receive \$450 million over 15 years plus \$165 million in improvement funds and \$85 million committed for economic development loans.

Under the U.S.-drafted 1947 trust agreement the United States asserted the right to use the islands for American defense and to maintain peace in the Pacific. The agreement can be terminated or amended only with U.S. consent.

Although the missile age has lessened the strategic importance of the Pacific islands, the United States still relies on the islands for naval and air stations. Guam, for example, is a major U.S. navy and air force base.

The United States also pledged to promote economic self-sufficiency, self-government and self-determination for the island people.

The islands' resources are limited mainly to harvesting coconuts and fishing, Williams said.

Lately, the scattered islands have begun to develop a flourishing tourist industry. Air Micronesia, operated by Continental Airlines, delivers sunseeking visitors of matchless beaches at Majuro, Truk, Yap and Koror.

Continental has opened new hotels at Truk, Koror and Saipan. Saipan, where hundreds of Japanese soldiers leaped from suicide and Banzai Cliffs in the 1944 battle, attracts increasing numbers of Japanese tourists exploring both battlegrounds and beaches.