

PACIFIC DAILY NEWS GUAM, October 28, 1974

TO: OMSN, EA/AI USUN, Amb. Williams

FROM: Status LNO Saipan

Hold for possible  
reply to Murphy

To Ed Archer

## Editorial

# Palau And Military.....

It saddens us a little to realize that some time in the years immediately ahead, there is going to be an angry confrontation between the people of Palau and the U.S. government, and especially the military.

Just recently the Palau District Legislature called for the suspension of status negotiations with the U.S. until the question of the return of public lands is resolved. The U.S. has favored the return of all public lands -- in principle -- but High Commissioner Edward E. Johnston recently vetoed a lands bill passed by the Congress of Micronesia. This action, the legislature said, "has clearly demonstrated once again (the United States') utter unwillingness to return said public lands in accordance with the expressed desires of the people of Micronesia."

The strongly worded resolution passed by the legislature also points out that the Palau delegation to the Congress of Micronesia, the speaker of the Palau Legislature and High Chief Ibedul recently informed U.S. Ambassador F. Haydn Williams that "no further discussions with respect to the United States military options in Palau can take place if the High Commissioner vetoed senate bill 296," on the land return.

It seems to be fact that the U.S. military has long wanted certain lands in Palau for "contingency use." The land itself, mostly near the harbor, doesn't amount to much. They also want a small staging, supply area near the airport on Babelthuap and would like to reserve a large hunk of Babeldaob for training purposes -- although they don't propose to buy or lease that land.

But, conversely, the people of Palau, their elected leaders, their chiefs and their more vocal students, have always been opposed to any U.S. military involvement in Palau.

So far the differences have been mainly arguments, written and verbal, because the U.S. military has been very careful to stay clear of any area that is outside the scope of the negotiations.

A few months ago, for instance, 57 Palauan students at the University of Guam expressed strong opposition to any future presence of the U.S. military in Palau. In a letter to the Palau Legislature, the district administrator, Ambassador Williams and the chairman of the Micronesian Committee on Future Status, the students said that they were shocked when they read in the Pacific Daily News that Ambassador Williams was going to Palau to meet with Palau's leaders about possible sites for military use in Palau. Yet, these sites have been spelled out before. Many times.

The three-paragraph letter read: "All of us are shocked about the news. After all we did not expect this to happen in our peaceful islands. It is our dream that the islands would be retained for Palauans, the other islanders, peace-loving Americans and other friendly foreigners.

"We did not dream of letting our beautiful islands be the home of bombs, bombs and hostilities. These things would make our peaceful Palau be a terrifying place to live.

"This is our great desire: To reserve the Palau Islands for us, our children and for peace. Not for hostilities! Please take our sincere request into consideration."

The letter follows earlier ones signed by all of the Palauan chiefs. In the meantime, according to the October issue of the Tia Belau, a Palauan newspaper, a U.S. military team of planners and base experts made a survey of Palau, identifying sites for the future U.S. military land requirements there. The Tia Belau said that in mid-August a team of military planners, 11 in all, headed by Rear Adm. William Crowe Jr., formerly with the U.S. office of Micronesian Negotiations, walked the jungles of Babeldaob, and helicoptered over the islands.

Three years ago the U.S. defined its land requirements in Palau as 30,000 acres for non-exclusive use for training purposes, 2,000 acres for exclusive use, both in Babeldaob, and 40 acres in Malakal Harbor, with joint use of Airai Airport. However, the land site in Babeldaob was never identified. It was believed that this was what the team intended to do in its most recent survey.

The only hopeful sign of a possible compromise came from the district legislature. Back in 1972, the leadership of Palau issued a declaration opposing any presence of the U.S. military. Subsequently, though, the Palau Legislature toned down its position and informed the U.S. that it might negotiate if the U.S. were to return all the public lands in Palau now controlled by the U.S. through the Trust Territory government.

Crowe told the Tia Belau: "We are here on a restrictive mission to gather data on the possible sites for the U.S. land requires. We are not here to negotiate but to make the study and then submit our recommendations to higher-ups in Washington who will make the final decisions as to which sites will be used by the United States."

Crowe insisted that the U.S. need for the 30,000 acres on Babeldaob had been misinterpreted. "When we say we want to use the land for maneuvers; we are talking about use rights, and this means that if there are any improvements made on the land, we will attempt to maneuver clear off the land. If, during the maneuvers, we alter or damage improvements on the land, we will pay for the damages. We will not be buying nor leasing the land." Adm. Crowe also told the newspaper that there would be 4,000 to 5,000 soldiers engaged in training and maneuvers for one to two months at a time within the 30,000 acres. The 2,000 acres would be used as a support base for training activities and should have ready access to both the airport and Malakal Harbor. Crowe said that the U.S. will lease this area from the owners. He also stated that the airport could be improved to accommodate military requirements.

Asked what the U.S. would do if Palau should oppose any military plans and presence in Palau, Crowe told Tia Belau: "The U.S. options in Palau are an integral part of the present negotiations to terminate the present status of Micronesia."

All this may be a matter of give and take in the years ahead. If the Palauans want their land back, and if they want a bridge, and if they want self government, and if they want an annual U.S. subsidy for an unspecified number of years, they may compromise yet on the military issue.

Without that compromise we can see nothing ahead for the foreseeable future. We doubt whether the U.S. government would risk a confrontation with the Palau people over the matter, unless the need for the land was immediate, as in a case of war.

Certainly, the case of the Palauans vs. the U.S. Military is a long way from being resolved yet. JCM.