

# FORMER PACIFIC BATTLEFIELDS GEAR UP TO JOIN U. S.

Political change is surfacing on islands where GI's fought during World War II. An on-the-scene report comes from William L. MacDougall of this magazine's staff.

### SAIPAN, Mariana Islands

The U. S. is about to acquire its first major new territory in more than half a century—and a host of headaches as well.

Within the next few weeks, if the present timetable holds, the Mariana Islands in the Pacific will reach a tentative agreement with the American Government on achieving commonwealth status along the lines of Puerto Rico.

The Marianas are familiar to American servicemen of World War II as a craggy island chain wrested from Japan. It passed into U. S. hands after the war as a part of the United Nations trusteeship known as Micronesia.

If the agreement is approved by the 14,000 people who live mainly on six islands—including Saipan, Tinian and Rota—as well as the Marianas legislature and the U. S. Congress, the chain could become an American commonwealth as early as 1976.

Already, the process has begun of splitting off the Marianas from Micronesia, officially called the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands. Breakaway of the

Marianas is widely regarded as dimming the chances for a stable, self-governing Micronesia under plans the U. S. previously endorsed.

While the situation has caused embarrassment for diplomats, the Pentagon is pleased. Among the assets of the Marianas is a potential military base which would be a listening post and springboard to the Asian continent.

Now being planned is a 292-million-dollar bomber and naval installation on Tinian. As the accompanying map shows, Tinian is only a few miles across the channel from the main Marianas island of Saipan. It was from a now jungle-covered airfield on Tinian that the Superfortress bomber Enola Gay took off to drop the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima in 1945.

American officials say the base could become a keystone of defenses in the Pacific—especially if, as some fear, the U. S. is forced out of posts in Okinawa, Japan and the Philippines.

Tinian also is important because the Pentagon is concerned about the future of defense installations on nearby Guam, long under the U. S. flag. There is strong opposition on that island to expansion of the bases, which were badly overcrowded during the Vietnam War.

"We simply can't let that happen again," declared a Defense Department official. "That's one of the reasons why Tinian is so vital."

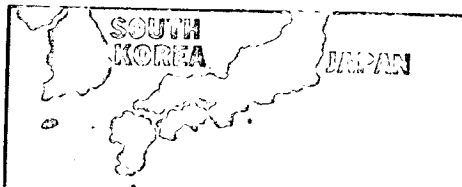
Construction of the 2,500-man base on Tinian, if approved by Congress, may begin in 1977 and continue for up to a decade.

The prospect of changes such a project would bring is a major issue in the Marianas, especially on Tinian, with a population of less than 800. A majority seems resigned to the idea, but recently an organized campaign of opposition appeared—including bumper stickers declaring "No Base on Tinian."

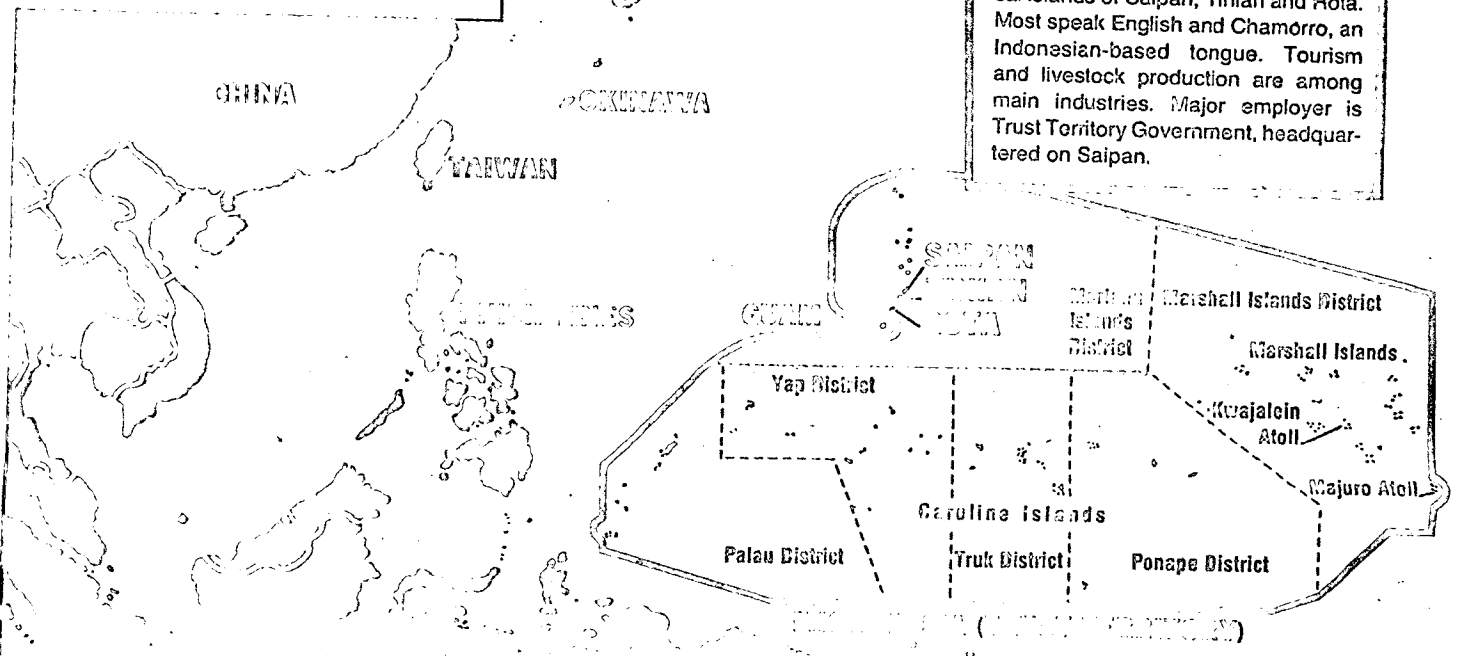
Less than half the 27,000-acre, green-covered island would remain for strictly civilian use under present plans.

A businessman, Baltasar Borja, 23, believes most island residents would accept the base if the U. S. would settle with the local population on their long-unresolved claims to portions of public lands. "A lot of people," he said, "are looking forward to better schools, hospitals and jobs the base would bring. We have been neglected too long."

**Status of people.** On Saipan, the capital of Micronesia and where the largest part of Marianas people live, there is little doubt in the minds of

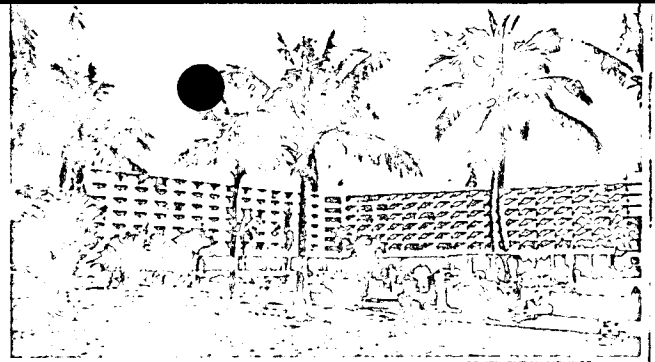


**THE MARIANA ISLANDS,** 5,600 miles west of mainland U.S., are a chain of 14 main isles. Majority of the 14,000 people live on the green, tropical islands of Saipan, Tinian and Rota. Most speak English and Chamorro, an Indonesian-based tongue. Tourism and livestock production are among main industries. Major employer is Trust Territory Government, headquartered on Saipan.





Majuro is the commercial center of the Marshall Islands, where a movement is rapidly growing to part company with the rest of Micronesia. USNSWR



New luxury hotel on Saipan is among accommodations drawing large crowds of tourists to the Marianas. CONTINENTAL AIRLINES



Workmen unload copra, one of the area's few commercial products, on Truk. In that district, support for a united Micronesia runs high. PHOTO RESEARCHERS



Saipanese children were born under U. S. flag. Now the islanders are hoping to become American citizens. PHOTO RESEARCHERS

political leaders that the union will be approved. Under tentative terms, the people of the Marianas would be American citizens, but without voting representatives in the U. S. Congress.

The Marianas and all the other districts of the Trust Territory were owned by Japan until the end of World War II. Then the area was turned over to the U. S. to prepare the citizens for self-government.

The entire Trust Territory, including the Marianas, covers 2,000 isles between the Philippines and Hawaii and has a population of 111,000.

Originally, the Marianas—like the rest of the Trust Territory—were supposed to remain a part of Micronesia.

But growing rivalries among the five other districts—more or less equivalent to States—soon disenchanted the Saipanese. Especially displeasing was a widespread movement in the Congress of Micronesia to loosen the area's ties with the U. S.

Many leaders in the Marianas feared their district, the most economically advanced in the Trust Territory, might lose everything gained under American administration.

Observed Vicente Santos, president of the Marianas legislature:

"The Marianas have been governed by many nations, and we have had an opportunity to judge them first hand. The best is the United States—and we want to be part of it."

**Impact of GIs.** Mr. Santos remembers that his own relations with Americans started out shakily. As a boy

in World War II, he was told by the retreating Japanese that the invading GIs would "kill the men and harm the women." He awakened in terror one night to discover American soldiers in his house.

"I was afraid for my mother," he recalls, "but it was nothing like the Japanese said. The Americans were kind. They smiled and gave us chocolate and went away."

After that, he said, the Americans helped to clean up Saipan and re-establish its institutions.

"Our loyalty to the American flag can't be questioned," he added. "Many of our young men went into the U. S. armed forces during the Vietnam War, and they are some of our most pro-American people now."

The legislator predicts a large majority—at least 60 per cent—will approve commonwealth status. In 1969, all but 25 of nearly 3,200 Marianas voters wanted to seek an American identity.

The district's economy is growing faster than that of most of its neighbors. Japanese honeymooners fly in by the planeload to luxury hotels along the golden beaches. A large new international airport is planned to handle the increasing traffic. Vast warehouses and petroleum tanks line the waterfront.

"We really are on our feet at last," observed a Saipan merchant. "We don't want to lose it all under an unstable Micronesian Government."

American negotiators working on arrangements for future Micronesian self-government had hoped that separatism

could be confined to the Marianas. Now, however, there are signs that others in the Trust Territory share the doubts about the area's ability to operate independently.

**Marshalls: taxes an issue.** In the easternmost district, the Marshall Islands, also the scene of bloody fighting in World War II, a strong separatist movement is gaining momentum. About half the tiny Japanese-made cars on the main island of Majuro, a long, narrow atoll fringed with palms, carry bumper stickers proclaiming: "Marshalls Mokta"—which translates into "Marshalls First."

The motto epitomizes the district's drive to retain more of its tax revenues, now shared with the rest of the relatively poorer Trust Territory, or go its own way.

More and more frequently heard are suggestions that the Marshalls, like the Marianas, should be divorced from Micronesia and attached in some way to the United States. A resolution to investigate the possibility was passed earlier this year by the district legislature.

A rich prize in the considerations is the big U. S. missile-testing site on Kwajalein Atoll, one of the Marshalls. The base provides employment for hundreds of Americans and Marshallese.

Majuro's Senator Amata Kabua, a regionalist, was re-elected to the Congress of Micronesia by a large majority on November 5. His opponent, Carl Heine, had made a campaign issue of support for a unified Micronesia.

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## PACIFIC ISLES FOR U. S.

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Mr. Heine contended that "the only realistic political course for Micronesia is to enter into a state of free association with the United States."

Under such an arrangement, Micronesians would govern themselves except in such matters as foreign relations and defense, which would be handled by the United States.

**Key differences.** Micronesian negotiators have more or less agreed with their American counterparts on all but two main issues: when, if ever, military-reserve lands should be returned to private owners, and whether the island nation should have the right after 15 years to sever all ties with the U. S.

In the latter event, Washington presumably would be asked to vacate any and all bases, including Kwajalein, if the Marshalls remain in the federation.

The Micronesian negotiating team appears insistent, but Senator J. Bennett Johnston, Jr. (Dem.), of Louisiana, head of the Senate Territories Subcommittee which helps determine Washington's policy in Micronesia, doubts that his colleagues would approve such an accord. The U. S. wants a guarantee that it—and no other nation—will retain such military installations.

At stake is an annual American appropriation to the area of 60 million dollars—virtually its only income, since there is very little industry or agriculture on the islands.

Some residents maintain they would rather revert to a "cocoanuts and fish" economy than surrender to Washington on this issue.

Others, however, insist that a majority of Micronesians are accustomed to "Cokes and Spam" and would not be willing to give them up.

Without U. S. aid, the Trust Territory would be hard pressed to maintain—much less to expand—the roads, telephones, schools and other services introduced in recent years.

Modern supermarket is among new facilities on increasingly prosperous Saipan.

PHOTO RESEARCHERS



Readying Micronesia for independent government is considered his most urgent mission by High Commissioner Edward E. Johnston, the U. S.-appointed chief administrator of the islands.

The prospect of a deadlock over the 15-year cutoff is a matter of growing concern on the islands. Senator Kabua considers it "unthinkable" that Micronesia and America should loosen their ties. He contends that a U. S. pullout "would leave us open to invasion by Red China, the Soviet Union or Japan."

This is one of the main reasons, he said, that the Marshalls may move toward separate negotiations with the U. S.

"The people of the Marshall Islands are very pro-United States," he commented. "It is most natural that we should continue to be closely associated with America—no matter what the rest of Micronesia does."

At the same time, there is considerable apprehension in the district about the future effects of closer links with the West. Traditional chiefs of the islands complain that their authority has been eroded—especially among the young.

Islanders in general criticize young people for picking up the "worst habits" of Westerners, including drunkenness and disrespect for elders.

On a recent typical evening on Majuro, drunks fell senseless on the floor, and fist fights were frequent in the island's leading bar, a corrugated iron shack at the edge of the lagoon.

**Instead of ham.** Eating habits also have changed radically, shifting from locally produced fruit, vegetables and fish to canned goods—such as macaroni—imported from the U. S. At a leading restaurant, a hamburger-and-eggs breakfast is routine when the cook runs out of canned ham.

Crowded movie houses play such films as "The Godfather" and Japanese dramas, even though most Marshallese-speaking islanders rarely understand much of either English or Japanese. There are no daily newspapers or television in the entire district.

About 100 Americans, including fishermen, teachers, administrators and missionaries, live on Majuro. Their manners and dress are widely copied.

In many ways, the Marshallese say, the Americans are much closer to them than the Micronesians of other districts. Most residents of one district are unable to understand the languages of the others, and their customs vary widely.

A Palauan, for example, often is stereotyped as "hard working" and "loud," while a Marshallese may be viewed as "easy going" or "passive."

"There's all this talk about Micronesian unity," observed one Marshallese,

"but if I went to the island of Truk and opened a store, I'd be stoned to death."

The future of the area is further clouded by a continuing dispute over Micronesian citizens' claims to publicly held lands.

Palau. The issue recently came to a head when the district legislature of Palau asked for a suspension of negotiations with the United States until the matter is settled. The islanders want restored to them parcels of land held in reserve for American military-training exercises.

Americans, however, maintain the problem should be resolved as part of the talks—not as a precondition.

**Yap, Truk, Ponape.** The Trust Territory's remaining three districts, Yap, Truk and Ponape, appear willing to go ahead with plans for a unified government. But, in many ways, they are the least developed areas of Micronesia.

The cars, jukeboxes and jet planes of the district centers are in direct contrast to many outer isles where both men and women routinely go bare-chested, eat mainly breadfruit and fish, and generally are subservient to their chiefs.

Many educated Micronesians despair that this cultural mixture—which they say is unprepared for Western democracy—will ever form an orderly, self-governing nation.

But others are convinced that the islanders have demonstrated their resourcefulness by functioning amid elected leaders, traditional chiefs and appointed administrators.

"Any people who can make this kind of system work are political geniuses," observed one foreign resident.

The problems ahead are staggering. With few exceptions, the economy is sluggish, and there is every prospect that U. S. aid, ranging from about 40 million to 80 million dollars a year, will be needed far into the future. In addition, Micronesians are divided among themselves as well as from Americans on key issues.

Nevertheless, many officials of both nationalities are convinced that agreement can be reached. If approved by the U. S. and Micronesian Congresses and a plebiscite of the islanders, the new nation—although smaller than once anticipated because of the defection of the Marianas—could become self-governing by 1977.

As for the Marianas, leaders here think that a strong American connection is the wisest course.

"We will be glad to pay the price, including the presence of a base," declared Representative Herman Q. Guerrero, a delegate from the Marianas to the Congress of Micronesia. "We want the security of being Americans."