

Marianas Back Commonwealth

By Carl Zimmerman
Star-Bulletin Writer

SAIPAN — Residents of the strategically important northern Mariana Islands voted overwhelmingly today to become American citizens.

The commonwealth covenant, which still must be approved by the U.S. Congress and the United Nations, gives the United States military lease rights on 18,000 acres, mostly on Tinian.

With nearly all the votes counted in the internationally supervised plebiscite, 3,024 persons voted yes and 928 voted no. The covenant needed

approval by at least 55 per cent of the voters to pass.

Acceptance of the commonwealth would separate the Marianas from the other four districts of the sprawling U.S. Trust Territory of the Pacific, which includes 2,100 mostly miniscule islands scattered across more than 3 million square miles.

AMERICAN MILITARY plans for the district were a major issue.

Even some persons who supported the commonwealth plan questioned whether \$19.5 million was enough for a 100-year

lease on the military lands.

The United States has eyed Tinian — where B-29 bombers took off in 1945 to drop atomic bombs on Japan — as the site for a \$300 million multiservice base. Military sources say the lands will be needed if the military runs out of room on nearby Guam, which already has a major naval base and a Strategic Air Command base.

Like Guam, the Marianas are just three hours from Japan or the Philippines by jet aircraft, and within bomber range of all of Southeast Asia.

The United Nations put the territory under U.S. control in 1947, and negotiations to decide the future status of all the islands began in 1959.

The Marianas, which sought closer ties with the United States, began separate status talks in 1972 and the covenant was completed in February.

THE REST of the Trust Territory apparently leans toward a looser relationship with the United States. Some residents have demanded independence.

The United States has set a deadline of 1981 for completing status negotiations.

The covenant with the Marianas is similar to the U.S. agreement with Puerto Rico. Residents would elect their own governor and legislature, while the United States would look after defense and foreign relations.

Residents would not vote in U.S. presidential elections and would not have a voting delegate in Congress.

Marianas residents would become U.S. citizens.

HONO 3-B
Correction 6/18/75
on Aid Figure

SIR: I read with interest the Honolulu Star-Bulletin story of June 9 by David Boorstin entitled "Marianas Plebiscite." There was one major error which should be corrected. In Boorstin's story it was written that "the Marianas Commonwealth agreement . . . will cost the federal government \$120-\$220 million annually for seven years." (Emphasis mine.) This is a 1000 per cent error.

Quoting from Mr. Boorstin's original Editorial Research Report, page 410, he writes "(the Marianas Commonwealth) . . . will receive \$98 million in federal aid over seven years." This is a considerable difference.

Sincerely yours,
Edward E. Johnston
High Commissioner
Trust Territory of the
Pacific Islands

the world

Northern Marianas vote to join U.S. as commonwealth

SAIPAN (UPI) — The people of the northern Mariana Islands voted yesterday to accept commonwealth status with the United States. It is the first time in half a century that the United States has acquired new territory.

The counting of the votes in more than half of the 13 precincts showed that about 80 per cent of the population of about 16,000 voted to accept the commonwealth covenant signed in February by their political leaders and agents of the United States.

The covenant provided that at least 55 per cent must vote in favor or the covenant is void.

THE ISLANDERS have been asking for admittance to the American family for 20 years, but it was not until three years ago that the United States agreed to enter into negotiations separate from the other five districts of Micronesia.

The new commonwealth will be composed of all the Mariana islands north of the American island of Guam and will include such prominent names of World War II as Saipan and Tinian.

Representatives from the United Nations General Assembly have been in the northern Marianas for two weeks overseeing the campaigning.

First results were radioed from the sparsely populated islands of Alaiagan, Agrihan and Pagan, about 250 miles north of Saipan. All of the 50 eligible voters in those three islands voted.

ROTA AND TINIAN, south of Saipan, also radioed their results, which continued the 80 per cent trend.

The United States will provide \$13.5 million a year to the northern Marianas for seven years and make a full range of Federal programs available.

The covenant will be sent to Congress with hopes that it will ratify the agreement by September.

Under the agreement, the Marianas will sell the United States land for military and other uses.