

# SAN JUAN ISLANDS

More Than a Century of Service - 1851-1975

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## ISLAND PLEBISCITE

### U.S. Acquires Marianas

SAIPAN (AP) — Residents of the strategically important Northern Marianas Islands, scene of bloody fighting during World War II, voted overwhelmingly Tuesday to become American citizens.

The commonwealth covenant, which still must be approved by Congress and the United Nations, gives the United States military lease rights on 18,000 acres, mostly on tiny Tinian Island. It would mark the first major acquisition of territory by the United States since the Virgin Islands in 1917.

With nearly all votes counted in Tuesday's internationally supervised plebiscite, 3,024 persons had voted for commonwealth status and 928 had voted

the \$19.5 million the United States will pay for a 100-year lease on the military lands is enough.

The United States has eyed Tinian — where B29 bombers took off in 1945 to drop atomic bombs on Japan — as the site for a \$300 million 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 1969.

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

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The covenant is similar to the U.S. agreement with Puerto Rico. Residents would elect a 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.

American military plans for the district were a major issue. Even some persons who supported the commonwealth questioned whether

The rest of the Trust Territory apparently leans toward a looser relationship with the United States, and some residents have demanded independence. The United States has set a deadline of 1981 for completing negotiations.

Marianas residents will become U.S. citizens, and the U.S. government has pledged \$14 a million a year in aid for the first seven years of the commonwealth agreement.

Observers from Australia, France and Britain monitored the voting, which was supervised by a U.S.-appointed commission headed by Erwin Canham, editor emeritus of the Christian Science Monitor.

The Soviet Union objected to the plebiscite and did not send an observer.

A 1973 census showed about two-thirds of the 2,770 wage earners on the islands work for the government. Half the workers are laborers or production workers, but there are six doctors, five dentists, eight lawyers and 215 teachers.