

# Nov. Plans Can Move Ahead On Tinian...

What makes Tinian so attractive to our military planners?

We learned a good deal about that from reading an article, sent to us by Rear Adm. Kent Carroll, commander of Naval forces in the Marianas, from the Commanders Digest, a publication of the Department of Defense providing official information to key military people on defense policies and programs.

For years we've heard about the possibility of a military base being established on Tinian. Most of it was just talk, but since the loss of South Vietnam and Thailand to our military forces, coupled with a lessening ability to use bases in the Philippines or Taiwan, that talk has increased.

It certainly is no secret that the signing of the Northern Marianas Covenant today by President Ford has heightened, anew, discussions on the potential base use of Tinian.

But before we get into the article, written by Robert Ellsworth, deputy secretary of defense, we should look into history.

During the early days of World War II it was apparent that because of some shortsightedness by the U.S. government in 1898, when the U.S. took only Guam and not the rest of the Marianas, there would be no way to protect the island from an attack by the enemy.

So we lost Guam in those black days of early December 1941 because there was no way to keep our supply lines into the island intact with the Japanese fleet and air forces so close to us at Rota, Palau, Tinian and Saipan. Guam was surrounded and was easy prey to an imaginative and eager foe.

Ellsworth says: "The strategic importance of the Northern Marianas stems from their geographic location -- relative to Asia, the Pacific Basin and Guam -- and the value of these islands in terms of our access to them and their denial to others.

"Along with Guam, the Northern Marianas are located on the threshold of Asia where U.S. traditional interest has been to prevent any potential hostile power or combination of powers from dominating the area."

Ellsworth makes the point that the Marianas are important to the maritime posture of the United States because essential trade routes crisscross through the area to ports in Japan, Taiwan, The Philippines, Indonesia and Asia. He notes that the Marianas, and Palau, also lie very close to north-south shipping lanes, linking Japan and Korea to oil resources of the Persian Gulf, via the Lombok Straits, and to the mineral resources of Indonesia, Australia and the South Pacific.

Major international air routes, east-west and north-south, also lead to the Marianas because of their central location as a fuel stop en route to other countries in the East Asia-Pacific region. "The to transit this area, without fear of harassment or interdiction, is an essential element of our strength as a maritime nation and our value as a friend and ally to other countries in the region," Ellsworth notes.

The deputy defense secretary says what the U.S. Congress should

have said in the late 1930s: "The close proximity of the Northern Marianas to the sea and airspace surrounding Guam is an important factor in terms of the defense of this island community."

Ellsworth wrote the article before the U.S. Senate passed the covenant, but it is clear that the writing was geared toward that passage. He says: "The covenant to establish a commonwealth of the Northern Marianas, in political union with the United States, clearly supports this nation's national-security interests and defense posture in the Western Pacific. Denial of these islands to the military force of any foreign nation will prevent the establishment of a military foothold which might be used to weaken the defenses of Guam, to interdict U.S. commerce, to deprive allies of essential raw materials or to endanger the resupply of those countries who rely upon the U.S. government for the production and delivery of defense material."

But why Tinian?

Under the covenant, Ellsworth notes, the government of the Northern Marianas will make 18,132 acres available to the U.S. on a long-term lease. This is a key factor, seen by the defense department as a hedge against unforeseen changes in the overseas base posture. He also says that the department has immediate and long-term requirements that cannot be satisfied on Guam or elsewhere in the Western Pacific. In general, the article notes, these requirements fall into three categories: training and readiness; facility realignment; and contingency planning.

With the end of hostilities in Indochina the defense department feels that it has become more important, rather than less, to provide opportunities for its people to be trained in such skills as amphibious operations, ship-to-shore bombardment and weapons delivery by tactical units. This sort of training is essential during peacetime operations, yet because of population growth, urban expansion and other environmental factors it has become more difficult to find a place for such training.

Tinian already has been used for small-scale amphibious exercises. Ellsworth also seems enthusiastic about the island of Farallon de Medinilla, because it is uninhabited and could be used, he says, for ship-to-shore bombardment and as a target for air-to-ground weapons delivery.

The deputy secretary admits that there is no immediate intention or authorization to undertake a military-construction program on Tinian. However, he notes that defense planners already face the problem of how to proceed with their programs while protecting local residents' safety, health and welfare. He sees the possibility of "the partial relocation of (community development) facilities to the Northern Marianas" because Tinian doesn't face the pressure of urban development found elsewhere and because the long-term capital investment would be on U.S. soil.

Another key usage of Tinian apparently will come in reserve war materials. Ellsworth says that Tinian provides what is lacking most on Guam and at many other logistic support bases in the Western Pacific -- space to accommodate conventional ammunition-storage facilities.

Because of the closeness between Guam and Tinian, Ellsworth says, the two base areas would be "mutually supporting." Together, he says, "Guam and Tinian would increase the U.S. government's preparedness to deal with a crisis in the East Asia and Pacific region, without having to rely on a widely scattered network of logistic support bases located in foreign countries."

Because the Tinian harbor and airfield are in advanced stages of deterioration, Ellsworth reports, it will be necessary to upgrade the basic island infrastructure to support the training requirements and to provide for expansion. This fiscal year, he says, the budget includes \$1 million for the planning and design of work necessary to repair the wharf, breakwater, causeway and runway. Then, when it becomes necessary to initiate construction, the U.S. Congress will be approached.

The signing of the covenant and the fact that Tinian now is safely under the U.S. flag will make congressional approval of such funding a good deal easier. JCM.

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