

Korea and Guam

By Peter Edson



KOREA'S war has brought to a new head the old boil of trouble over transfer of U. S. Naval Government to civilians on Guam, the other Marianas Islands, American Samoa and the United Nations trust territory in the Marshall and Caroline Islands of the Pacific.

Transfer of government on Guam from Navy to the Interior Department was scheduled for July 1. An organic act for Guam, establishing civilian self-government, has passed the House and been reported favorably by Senate Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs. The bill is on the Senate's consent calendar and is scheduled for action soon.

Appropriations of \$1,250,000 to run the new civilian government on Guam have also been approved by the House and are pending before the Senate.

IF the North Korean attack had been delayed a week or ten days, this transfer of government might have been made.

Since last September, Gov. Carleton Skinner, a civilian, has been in Guam, taking over from Naval Government. Some 400 to 500 naval officers and enlisted personnel on Guam gradually have been replaced by civilians and released for other, more active duty.

Everything was all set for the big switchover. Promises made to the Guamanians 50 years ago, when they were liberated from Spanish rule, that the islands would be given local self-government under the Stars and Stripes, were about to be carried out. Navy had agreed to it, and everything seemed simpatico.

But in June, Defense Secretary Louis Johnson and Chief of Staff Gen. Omar Bradley visited Guam for

a few days, during their quick trip to Japan and back. Secretary Johnson didn't have much time for Gov. Skinner, except for a few minutes at the airport before take-off.

The Navy apparently saw to it that the two weren't seated together at official gatherings, altho at that time Gov. Skinner was responsible to Navy Secretary Francis P. Matthews, and not to Interior Secretary Oscar Chapman.

Nothing happened to change the schedule of transfer until after the North Koreans attacked June 25. Then Secretary Johnson put up to the President a proposal to delay matters indefinitely. Secretary Chapman demurred on an indefinite delay. They compromised on a 30-day postponement.

So the thing may go thru o.k. Aug. 1, unless either or both of two things happen:

1. If the Senate unexpectedly balks on passage of the Guam organic act or appropriations for the civilian government, it will be no dice. Or

2. If the Defense Department or the Navy asks for further delay and the President approves, again no dice. This latter possibility is the more likely.

Only reason given publicly for further delay of the governmental transfer is that it would avoid confusion in time of crisis. But the actual transfer of government has all been made during the past 10 months. All that remains is the formality.

GUAM is 1500 miles from Manila, Tokio and Formosa, so is in no immediate danger zone. But Guam is still an important naval and air base. Navy's top man on Guam is Rear Admiral Osborne B. Hardison, who recently relieved Rear Admiral Edward C. Ewen as Commander Marianas.

Navy really controls Guam because no ship can touch there and no person can land without Navy clearance.