

TRUST TERRITORY OF THE PACIFIC ISLANDS

Office of the High Commissioner

March 20, 1961.

Mr. James P. Davis, Director
Office of Territories
Department of Interior
Washington, D. C.

My dear Director Davis:

As soon as Mr. McConnell and his party returned to Pearl Harbor, after five weeks of intensive survey in the Trust Territory, I was ready to report to you my decision in regard to headquarters.

On reading the proposed organic Act, I noted that the decision as to location of headquarters is to be made by the President, therefore, the reference to the President in the dispatch which we sent Monday morning through channels.

Realizing that a designation of headquarters was the first essential decision, I have studied, thought and consulted more on this point than upon any other. When McConnell's party came back with a strong and unanimous recommendation, I was greatly pleased to find that the members of our group were in complete harmony with what I, myself, had tentatively decided as to the choice of location. The decision is that Saipan is by far the best site in the territory, and the only possible site for headquarters, if we are to be ready to operate administration from a base in the territory by July 1.

Mr. McConnell's party had no knowledge of my tentative conclusions, but their unanimous recommendation confirms my judgment. These are some of the reasons which influenced me and, I think, influenced the group:

1. Consideration of the strategic situation -- the territory's relation to any emergency and to the activities and plans within the territory of other governmental agencies established there.
2. In the administration of this vast territory transportation and communication are the dominating considerations. Saipan is near the channels of transportation and communication with the outside world and it is also a gateway to the Trust Territory. The concept of "geographical center" of the territory has little meaning, in fact, it can be very misleading. Effective access to the territory and to the outside world, and between the territory and the outside world, is the vital consideration in the choice of an administrative site.
3. The harbor and the dock facilities at Saipan are excellent. The anchorage is well protected and the deep water channel is well marked. There are no hazards within the inner harbor that cannot be readily identified. Due to excellent protection this

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port affords economical ship-handling with a minimum use of tugs. The ship berthing facilities are sufficient for Trust Territory requirements, in addition to a large volume still available for military use if and when necessary. Air landing strips on Saipan are excellent and in good condition. Connected with them are terminal, hangar and shop buildings. No other harbor or air facilities in the territory compare with those of Saipan for adequacy, safety and availability. In striking contrast to all other areas, central warehousing and oil storage facilities are more than adequate at Saipan.

4. As indicated in our dispatch, the former naval operations base above the harbor at Saipan, now vacant, has been selected as being well suited for temporary headquarters. The permanent site lies directly behind, at a higher elevation, in an area used during occupation, but now abandoned by the Army. The buildings at the proposed temporary site have all been vacant for at least six months. They are still in fair state of repair and can be rehabilitated at moderate cost. But they are deteriorating fast. Some fixtures and appliances have been and are now being removed from the buildings and dilapidation is setting in. It is estimated that without rehabilitation the whole collection of structures on that area will be practically valueless for any use within a year. After rehabilitation and temporary use by us they would be available for any other desirable purpose.
5. On Saipan, much more than on any other island in the territory, there is a large quantity of building material suitable for salvage and re-use. This also is deteriorating and disappearing fast. By use of some of this material, it is estimated that acceptable temporary quarters can be provided on this area quickly and at a cost of perhaps one million dollars less than at any other point in the territory. Every other possible site would require development "from the ground up", so to speak, with procurement and shipment of practically all necessary materials.
6. In a remote and detached region like the Trust Territory morale and efficiency of the headquarters personnel and their dependents is not a negligible factor. It is strongly urged that Saipan would be less depressing in these respects than any other place available. The rainfall is less and, to most Americans, the climate is "better" than in any other group of islands. On Saipan there are miles of level ground and paved roads. All other sites considered have practically no paved roads. Moreover, there is little space in which to build them. Only iron jeeps are practicable.



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Civilian control means civilian personnel. Therefore, the development of contented groups from the standpoint of community morale is very important in overcoming a sense of restriction and confinement on all of the islands. Our Medical Director was a member of the party just returned. He is emphatic on the advantages of Saipan in this respect and reports that the present Field Medical Director and all other physicians out there who have seen all of the territory definitely concur in his opinion.

You are, of course, familiar with these and other reasons dictating the choice of location, as Interior's Management Survey of last summer unqualifiedly recommended Saipan.

I realize that my recommendation must be reviewed by all concerned. Whatever the outcome, we will do the best job possible. My estimates as to money and time of transfer, however, must necessarily be contingent upon the location of the headquarters. I am pleased with the fine way our group has worked and with the excellent cooperation they have shown. We have started planning for the transfer.

I am sure that you, yourself, realize, and I wish you would convey the point to Secretary Chapman, that the problems of transfer out here are very much greater and more complicated than those incident to other, more unified, and compact territories.

After the Organic Act becomes law, the tasks imposed upon us will be quite different from those of other territories.

In closing, let me re-emphasize the point that our administration and all of our administrative activities will hinge on the mobility of the administrative staff to come and go as necessary. In dealing with small, unrelated communities scattered over three million miles of ocean, the location of our headquarters and the adequacy and flexibility of transportation and communication are quite obviously a key to our success.

Regards all around.

Most sincerely yours,

(sgd.) ELBERT D. THOMAS

High Commissioner

