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OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

For Release JULY 1, 1951

SAMOA AND TRUST TERRITORY TRANSFERRED TO DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Taking over administrative responsibility for American Samoa and the Trust Territory in the Pacific from the Navy today, Secretary of the Interior Oscar L. Chapman pledged that the Department and the new territorial officials "will maintain the high standards of public service which have characterized the Navy's administration of these areas."

In a letter to Secretary of the Navy Francis P. Matthews, Secretary Chapman expressed the Interior Department's appreciation for the valuable assistance of the Navy Department in successfully carrying out the transfer of the Pacific areas.

"We are grateful not only to you and those on your staff in Washington who have co-operated wholeheartedly at every step, but also to the naval officers and men in those territories, without whose assistance an orderly transfer would have been impossible," he said.

Administration of American Samoa, an American possession, will be taken over today by Governor Phelps Phelps of New York, appointed by President Truman as the first civilian Governor of the territory. Administrative responsibility for the Trust Territory, which is administered by the United States under agreement with the United Nations, will be assumed by High Commissioner Elbert Thomas, former United States Senator from Utah.

Governor Phelps and High Commissioner Thomas along with other territorial officials of the Department of the Interior have been in the island territories since early this year preparing for the transfer from the Navy.

The Trust Territory is composed of 96 islands and island groups and includes the Marianas (except Guam), the Carolines and Marshall Islands. The geographic center of the Territory, is about 6,000 miles southwest of San Francisco.

Secretary Chapman stressed today his instructions to the new territorial officials to observe the traditional policy of the United States of nondiscrimination and encouragement of the islanders in developing self-governing institutions.

"I want the civilian officials in the Pacific territories to observe faithfully the traditional policy of the United States as carried forward by the President and the Department of equal treatment of all persons, regardless of race, color, or creed," the Secretary said.

Referring to the achievements in self-government and economic progress in other territories under the jurisdiction of the United States, the Secretary asserted:

"I have great faith in the ability of the Samoans and the Trust Territory islanders to develop self-governing institutions out of their own traditional cultural patterns. The Department will fully support this advancement as well as the efforts to protect and develop the land and other resources of the islanders."

The text of Secretary Chapman's letter to Secretary Matthews follows:

"My dear Mr. Secretary:

"Now that arrangements have been completed for the transfer of administrative responsibility for American Samoa and the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands from the Navy Department to the Department of the Interior on July 1, I wish to express this Department's deep appreciation for the valuable assistance rendered by the Navy Department in planning and carrying out this transfer. We are grateful not only to you and those on your staff in Washington who have cooperated wholeheartedly at every step, but also to the naval officers and men in these territories, without whose assistance an orderly transfer would have been impossible.

"The Navy has reason to be proud of its record in these territories. It has faithfully protected the lands of the Samoans, protected their health, provided them with increasing educational opportunities, and laid the basis for their exercising a greater measure of local self-government. The Navy's administration of the Trust Territory has been commended by the Trusteeship Council of the United Nations and has therefore been a credit to our country. Much remains to be done in both areas, and I assure you and the naval personnel who have devoted themselves to the welfare of the peoples concerned that this Department and the territorial officials will maintain the high standards of public service which have characterized the Navy's administration of these areas.

"The Navy deserves special commendation for its unstinting cooperation and assistance in carrying out the transfer of jurisdiction over these areas from naval to civilian administration. The policy underlying the transfer is fundamental in our democratic tradition and form of government. The readiness with which the Navy has supported and carried out this policy provides further concrete evidence of the keen awareness among the military agencies and personnel concerned of their role in our democracy.

"I hope you will convey to the members of your Department and to the naval personnel in the Pacific this sincere expression of appreciation for a job well done. Our agencies will continue to have closely related interests in the area, and I assure you that representatives of this Department both in Washington and the field will cooperate in every possible way toward the fulfillment of the naval mission in the Pacific."

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