

Aug. 21: Guam's unsung anniversary

Editor's note: This is the first part of a two-part commentary on the anniversary of the lifting of the Navy security clearance in Guam.

Though not as well known as other historic dates for the Marianas, August 21 marks the 50th anniversary of a milestone in Guam's post-World War II development. On that day in 1962, President John F. Kennedy's Executive Order 11045 rescinded the Navy's wartime authority to refuse entry to civilian visitors for security reasons. The action unleashed the island's tourism potential and ushered in an era of unprecedented economic and social advancement.

First granted in 1941, the Navy had reinstated this authority on Dec. 3, 1950, at the outbreak of the Korean War, but the requirement was continued in force long after that conflict ended in 1953. An obvious obstacle to economic development, especially tourism, the security clearance program was roundly criticized by Guam leaders and the business community, who believed the authority conflicted with the 1950 Organic Act that had established a civilian government for the island. Some local attorneys regarded the program as unconstitutional.

The credit for persuading Kennedy to issue his order is usually given to Bill Daniel, an

eccentric and occasionally flamboyant Texas politician whom the president had appointed as governor of Guam in 1961. That appointment was generally not well received on the island because Daniel had no knowledge of Guam, let alone experience in insular territory governance, and he displaced then-Gov. Joseph Flores, who had been the first Chamorro appointed to the position since the Organic Act.

Daniel's 16-month tenure, from May 1961 to January 1962, was also not without its local critics, some of whom accused the appointee of political favoritism in his selections for government of Guam executive branch positions.

A quick study

Yet Daniel proved to be a quick study who learned about the island, its people, their needs and aspirations. Many Guam legislators regarded him as the first non-Chamorro governor since Carlton Skinner to

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show real interest in their opinions. He became a strong advocate for greater self-government, increased economic development and social advancement, telling a 1961 U.S. Governor's Conference, "We have neglected these industrious and ambitious people ... (and) it's going to be hard to build up (Guam) with industry, new business, (and) tourism ... with this wall around the island."

When it came to lobbying against the security clearance with the Washington establishment, Daniel was well-connected through his Texas family and their political allies in the Kennedy administration. A graduate of Baylor University, Daniel, a Democrat, had served as a member of the Texas House of Representatives from 1949 to 1953. His brother Price, who held the same 14th District office from 1939 to 1945, had been a U.S. senator (1952 to 1956) and was then governor of Texas (1957 to 1963).

The Daniel brothers were allies and supporters of Lyndon Baines Johnson, whose selection as vice-presidential running mate helped Kennedy gain Southern Democratic support during the election campaign. Kennedy also appointed a Johnson protege, John Connolly, as Secretary of the Navy, and recruited Richard Flores Taitano, a young, dynamic leader from Guam, to head up the Office of Territories in the Department of the Interior.

Bill Daniel "arbitrated" the security clearance issue with the Interior Department, which oversaw federal policy

for the island, and the Navy Department, which maintained it was a necessary security requirement, trying to work out an agreement for a recommendation to the President to rescind the controversial program. Daniel reportedly gained Connolly's assent, but after Connolly left office in 1962 to run for Texas governor, his successor backed away from the agreement.

President Kennedy

Undeterred, Daniel pressed the issue directly with the White House through his Texas connections. Fortuitously, the Kennedy administration at that time was becoming concerned about Micronesia due to mounting islander and United Nations' criticism regarding the lack of economic and social progress in the U.S.-administered Trust Territory. Having served in the South Pacific during World War II, Kennedy had a better understanding and appreciation of the strategic importance of Guam and

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Micronesia in the U.S. defense posture in the Western Pacific.

Fearing the loss of American influence and control of this immense area, his administration was working out a national policy and strategy for persuading Micronesians to join the American political family. An accelerated economic and social development program, followed by a region-wide plebiscite on U.S. commonwealth, was recommended in what came to be known as the infamous Solomon Report.

In this context, Guam was coming to be viewed, as Bill Daniel had told the U.S. Governor's Conference, not only as a U.S. "bastion of defense" but also as "a showcase of democracy and a symbol of American pride here close to the 'Bamboo Curtain.'" A developing Guam, which already served as the transportation and communication hub of Micronesia, would demonstrate American commitment to the region and model the benefits of U.S. affiliation for the trust isles.

Guam leaders acted quickly on Kennedy's order. The following year Gov. Manuel F.L Guerrero, who had succeeded Daniel, issued an executive order establishing the Guam Tourism Commission within the Department of Commerce, then headed by Jose D. Leon Guerrero. Guerrero also appointed Rex Wills of Hawaii to manage the new Guam Visitors Bureau, which promoted the island's tropical beauty and tradewind climate in Japan.

Island businessmen such as Pete Sgro and

Pete Ada, among others, worked to interest investors, including Pan Am, in the island's tourism potential. Charter flights tested the concept and by 1967 Pam Am had inaugurated regular service between Tokyo and Guam.

The rest, as they say, is history. While mass tourism has not been an unmixed blessing, the industry, which now hosts about 1.3 million visitors annually, has clearly provided the island with a solid private sector base, vastly expanded opportunities for local entrepreneurs and workers, and made the island a frequent destination for East Asian tourists. Its growth also has underscored the island's comparative advantages for commercial expansion and generated a sense of economic and political empowerment among island leaders.


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