

INTERVIEW OF FRANK H. CORNER

By Deanne C. Siemer

(by correspondence,

See next)

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Ambassador Frank Corner  
26 Burnell Avenue  
Thorndon  
Wellington  
NEW ZEALAND

Dear Ambassador Corner:

Howard Willens and I are writing a book about United States policy with respect to Micronesia from 1961 when President Kennedy took office through 1972 when the Marianas split off and began separate political status negotiations with the United States. As a part of our research, we obtained previously classified documents from the U.S. Government under the Freedom of Information Act.

Among these documents, we found information about the 1964 United Nations Visiting Mission to the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands. You chaired that Mission, and it appears from the documents that you were a prime force in urging that Micronesia consider the political status of free association. It also appears that you rejected the Marianas bid for separate status and encouraged them to remain a part of Micronesia.

We have completed a first draft of the manuscript, and we are now trying to check on details, obtain additional facts, and make sure that we have it right. I have enclosed a copy of Chapter 3 that covers the 1964 Visiting Mission and your participation. I wrote to Justice Robertson to try to find you because you had an important role in the development of policy both in the United States and in Micronesia. He was kind enough to provide us with your address.

We have the following questions:

- (1) Did you know about the Kennedy Administration policy decision to make Micronesia a part of the United States by 1968? This was known as National Security Action Memorandum No. 145 and it was issued in 1962.
- (2) Did you work on any aspect of the Cook Islands political status?
- (3) What were the views of your colleagues on the 1964 Visiting Mission from Liberia, China, and the U.K. with respect to the ultimate political status for Micronesia?
- (4) What was your view at the time of the likelihood that the United States would arrive at a separate political status agreement with the Marianas? What did you think about the differences in language and culture among the districts of Micronesia and whether they could be accommodated in a single political entity?

(5) Were there any political forces operating at the United Nations with respect to the political status of Micronesia when you chaired the Visiting Mission (or thereafter) that we should describe in order to give the reader a complete picture?

(6) What participation did you have with respect to Micronesian political status after the 1964 Visiting Mission Report?

(7) What is your view about how the different Marianas and Micronesian political status arrangements work out once they were concluded?

(8) Could you give us some biographical information about yourself so that we can explain how you came to be head of the Visiting Mission and where you served after that?

Both Mr. Willens and I worked on Marianas political status matters. From 1972 through early 1975, he was counsel to the Marianas Political Status Commission that negotiated the political status agreement with the United States and both he and I worked as counsel to the subsequent 1976 constitutional convention in the Marianas. We have also written a book about the 1972 through 1976 period describing the Marianas political status negotiations. Because we have been so closely associated with the Marianas, we have tried to be particularly careful in tracking down details with respect to the other island chains in Micronesia to be sure that our own personal views have not colored our descriptions of what happened. Your assistance in this regard would be much appreciated.

If it would be convenient, we would be delighted if you could call us collect in the United States, 202/726-6269, to talk about your recollections. Alternatively, we would be glad to arrange to have someone take down the information we are looking for and send it to us.

Sincerely,

Deanne C. Siemer

<b>TO:</b>	DEANNE SIEMER, 4242 MATHEWSON DR., N.W. WASHINGTON, D.C. 20011. U.S.A.
<b>FROM:</b>	FRANK CORNER, 26 BURNELL AVENUE, WELLINGTON 1. N.Z. E-MAIL: CORNER@PARADISE.NET.NZ

Dear Deanne Siemer,

I shall answer your letter of 7 March as best I can. It is a long time since I was involved with Micronesia. I am now blind and cannot easily look up references.

1. No. (Though there were rumours of a then unknown Solomon at work on some project.)
2. Yes. (I had persuaded the New Zealand Government towards speeding up the move of the Cook Islanders towards managing their own affairs, and I was proposing to bring G.A. Resolution 1541 to bear upon the situation. This meant rescuing it from the oblivion into which the all-powerful radical proponents of Resolution 1514 (immediate independence) had consigned it. Given the passionate temper of the U.N. of that time, this was a tough battle. But in the end, because of the Cook Islands precedent, (to which we had given the name “free association”) the U.N. was brought to accept that there were ways other than instant independence by which peoples might achieve self-determination, and the territory might be released from the supervision of that body. I might add that some Administering Authorities in later years gave meanings to “free association” that differed from my conception of its legitimate nature.
3. All four members associated themselves with the Mission’s report, which I had written. All believed that the people of Micronesia should, in due course and when they felt ready for it, make their own decision on their future status. They did not wish to push for any particular status. But, given the circumstances of Micronesia and given their sense of what the U.N. might accept, they thought that “free association” should be among the several alternatives worthy of consideration.
4. I don’t remember any suggestion that the United States was intending to partition the Trust Territory.

I was very much aware—who could not have been? of the complexity of the Territory, of the variety of its cultures and languages, and I was under no illusion that the creation of a sense of “Micronesia” would be a very long process.

5. Two of the great heads of steam in the United Nations of that time were: the demand for instant independence for all non-self-governing territories (though I don’t recall Micronesia being singled out); and the Cold War constant propaganda battle (where, in The Trusteeship Council and in the Assembly’s Fourth Committee, the Soviet representatives used every discussion of Micronesia to pile dirt on the United States). The best way, in my opinion, of dealing with the first was to accept that all territories had the right of self-determination; but it was the right of the people to determine the pace and the result. If one stood on the rock of the wishes of the people the administering authority was on secure ground and could prevent itself or the people of a territory from being bullied by the U.N. majority. It was necessary to show goodwill to the United Nations and generosity to the people of the territory in assisting them to be in a position to take over the management of their affairs. To be positive and generous was the best way of undercutting the Soviet Union and its supporters.

6. None, except contesting the constant Soviet attempts to use or distort my, and other, reports to discredit the United States.
7. I have not kept up with events sufficiently to have an opinion.
8. I was appointed, I assume, because I was known by my colleagues to have been involved in colonial and trusteeship questions for many years (having dealt with Western Samoa and having brought the U.N. to set a precedent by accepting independence for this very small Trust Territory without its exercising its right of membership of the U.N.), to have worked with members of the Trusteeship Council for two years and to have been elected as their President. I had been permanent Representative of New Zealand to the U.N. from 1961 and continued in that position until 1967 when I became Ambassador to the United States.

Before 1961 I had often been a member of N.Z. Delegations to the General Assembly and on occasions after 1967 until my retirement in 1980 attended meetings of the General Assembly as Leader or member of the New Zealand Delegation.

You ask for further biographical information. The main facts can be found in such publications as *Who's Who*. At the end of 1972, I left Washington for Wellington to take up the position of Secretary of Foreign Affairs and Permanent Head of the Prime Minister's Department until I retired in 1980.

During this time, and for four years after my retirement, I was also Administrator of Tokelau, a group of three small Pacific islands, not unlike many of those in Micronesia. I was concerned to bring these three islands to the point where they could make an act of self-determination; that point has still not been reached – a situation which makes one ponder about dealing with the infinitely larger problem of Micronesia!

I should perhaps mention that I first became involved in the question of the future of non-self-governing territories in 1943, in discussions with the British Government, and in preparing briefs for the N.Z. Delegation to the San Francisco Conference at which the N.Z. Prime Minister, Peter Fraser, was Chairman of the Trusteeship Committee which drafted the relevant Chapter of the U.N. Charter.

Sincerely,

FRANK CORNER