

## United States Overseas Territories

### American Samoa

American Samoa is an unincorporated and unorganized territory of the U.S. There are 18 members of the Senate and 20 members of the House of Representatives. The head of state is the President of the United States. There are two capitals; Fagatogo, where the House and Senate operate from, and Utulei, where the governor resides. The main village, and the one usually listed as the destination for tourists arriving on aircraft and ship is Pago Pago, which has the unlikely pronunciation of "*Pango Pango*". Pago Pago Harbor, as it is called, nearly cuts the island of Tutuila in half. Around it are scattered at least nine villages, which averages out to be one village per mile. This harbor, one of the best deep water ports in this section of the South Pacific, was ceded to the United States as a naval and coaling station in 1872 and in 1878 America was granted freedom of trade and extra-territorial jurisdiction in Samoa. The Tripartite Treaty of 1889 between Great Britain, Germany and the United States, proclaimed the Samoan Islands neutral territory. They were permitted an independent government and allowed to follow their own laws and customs. A Supreme Court of Justice, with an American judge, was established to deal with all civil and criminal matters affecting foreigners. After ten years, however, there were serious disturbances in Samoa, and a further treaty, signed in 1899, abolished the kingship and gave Western Samoa to Germany and Eastern Samoa, later known as American Samoa, to the United States.

The world powers in the early nineteenth century sought to establish coaling stations at islands in the oceans for the newly invented technology of steam engines which had quickly replaced sails, especially on military vessels. Some of these we have written about recently, such as Chi Chi Shima in the Bonin Islands and Guam in the Marianas. The U.S. also had the use of Pearl Harbor in the Hawaiian Islands and the Midway Islands near the northern reaches of the Hawaiian chain to mention a couple more. The so-called Spanish-American War had a great deal to do with American expansion, both politically and militarily around the world. In it we gained Puerto Rico and Guantanamo Bay in Cuba in the Caribbean Sea and the Philippine Islands in the western Pacific close to the Asian mainland. Heaps of coal soon appeared on all of these outreaches for re-supplying the US Navy. These outposts took on even more significance with the advent of air flight.

Probably many Americans today will wonder about the frequent references to Germany when covering the history of the various Pacific islands. In the period between 1910 and the outbreak of World War I, in 1914, the German flag was seen everywhere in the Pacific. German liners connected all German Pacific ports with Sidney, Australia and Auckland, New Zealand; German commercial penetration was forceful and persistent; and islands industries generally received much stimulus and development from German money and personnel, and disrupted the efforts of other nations to compete with the Germans.

Germany, in 1914, plunged the world into a great war, and sacrificed all the enormous gains she had made in trade, industries and colonies during the previous 40 years. Coming late as a colonial power, she had had remarkable successes, but within a few months in 1914, she had lost all she had created in Africa, Asia and the Pacific.

Germany's Pacific colonies were quickly occupied by the allies, with Australia and New Zealand taking control of the islands south of the equator and Japan, who had not been an active participant in WWI, was given control of Micronesia (the Caroline, Marshall and Mariana island groups).

The League of Nations had been formed following the surrender of Germany in 1918; and it was decided that the German colonies should be the property of, and controlled by, the League. There thus evolved the system of mandates – certain powers were given a mandate to administer, on behalf of the League, certain ex-enemy colonies.

It was seen in the twenties that Japan was gathering up trade and territory abandoned by Germany, and was becoming increasingly land-hungry and aggressive. By the thirties, there was no doubt that Japan was planning a mighty empire for herself in East Asia and the Pacific.

Because of the withdrawal of the United States in 1919, the League of Nations was born weak, and it never grew teeth, and it never functioned as a guardian of the world's peace. It was seen, within a few years, that Germany was being re-built on a dream of world conquest; that Italy and Japan were similarly equipping themselves for "glory"; and apparently there was nothing that the League of Nations could do about it.

Mandated territories were supposed to be open to all nations, but Japan kept a tight and jealous hold over Micronesia, and was not friendly to other nationals who wanted to go there, although she reported annually upon the mandate to the League of Nations. However, in 1932 the Japanese walked out of the League, tore up the mandate, and from that point on treated Micronesia as if were part of the Japanese Empire.

South of the equator the British nations scrupulously observed all the terms of their mandates.

Following the end of WWII, a new world authority, called the United Nations was set up to deal with international affairs and responsibility for the various mandated territories was transferred from the League to the trusteeship council of the UN.

Hopefully, this brief summary will give you a better understanding of how the United States came to be involved with the various islands and territories, especially in the Pacific.

#### **Historic Bytes**

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