

## November 17<sup>th</sup>

On this day in 1899, a small contingent of German colonial officials took formal possession of the Northern Mariana Islands during a public ceremony held in Garapan Village.

A few months earlier, Germany purchased the islands of Micronesia (except Guam) from Spain which had been defeated by the United States during the Spanish-American War of 1898.

Germany, a newly unified country, was anxious to acquire territories so that it could compete with the other European colonial powers of the time.

The purchase of Micronesia allowed the Germans to add a large section of the northwest Pacific to their colonial map.

The German delegation arrived at Saipan on the morning of November 17, 1899 aboard the steamer *Kudot* which was accompanied by the gunship SMS *Jaguar*.

The delegation was led by Rudolf von Bennigsen, the Governor General of German New Guinea.

Von Bennigsen was accompanied by Georg Fritz, the man selected to head the German colonial government on Saipan, and a contingent of naval troops from the SMS *Jaguar*.

Spanish officials had arrived at Saipan aboard the ship *Uranus* a few days before. They were met by Colonel Eugenio Blanco, a Philippine-born Spaniard, who had been appointed to serve as the Governor of the Northern Marianas in May.

Blanco commanded a volunteer regiment of 200 Filipino troops from the province of Pampanga who had remained loyal to Spain.

The official transfer ceremony began at 4:00 pm on the afternoon of 17 November in the plaza immediately to the west of the Garapan Catholic Church.

The focal point of the ceremony was the residence of the prominent Chamorro businessman Vicente Flores Diaz which was situated on the western edge of the plaza.

The Diaz house had served as the seat of the Spanish administration since Colonel Blanco's arrival in May.

As a band played and troops - both Filipino and German - stood at attention, the Spanish flag was taken down and replaced with the flag of Imperial Germany.

Many of the island's 1,800 indigenous residents also watched the ceremony which ended more than three centuries of Spanish colonial rule.

Blanco and his troops departed for Spain at the end of the month leaving Saipan under the control of the newly installed district officer Fritz who, like his predecessor, used the Diaz house as his administrative headquarters.

Thus began a relatively brief period of German rule of the Northern Mariana Islands which lasted until the outbreak of the First World War.



German and Filipino troops stand at attention as the Spanish flag is lowered from the Diaz residence on November 17, 1899. The large building on the right is the barracks for Governor Blanco's volunteer regiment. A portion of the old barracks site is now occupied by Bank Pacific.