



THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS
Palauan Experiences of War and Reconstruction
1944 - 1951.

by
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Abstract

On 30 March 1944 the violence of World War Two reached the Palau Islands in the Western Carolines, when aircraft from US Navy Task Force 58 launched air strikes on Japanese installations in Koror, Angaur, Peleliu and Babeldaob. This thesis begins by asking what this attack meant for individual Palauans, and by examining how people reacted to the new world of war.

In their drive across the Central Pacific, American forces had already taken some of the Japanese Mandated Islands of Micronesia, including Kwajalein and Eniwetok in the Marshalls, and Saipan and Tinian in the Marianas. The air attack on Palau signalled the beginning of the end of Japanese administration in that group of islands. Until that time relations between Palauans and Japanese had been reasonable, even though Palauans were regarded as third class citizens. The war brought about a severe deterioration in this relationship as both groups fought for survival.

In September 1944, American troops seized Peleliu and Angaur, forcing a separation between the southern and northern islands of the Palaus. The different war experiences of the people remaining on Angaur through the battle for that island, and the other inhabitants of Palau who were evacuated to the "bypassed" island of Babeldaob in the north, are examined. This second group of Palauans shared the "big island", which was under constant American air attack for more than a year, with nearly 37,000 Japanese. The threat of air raids dominated the lives of Palauans, forcing them to take refuge in the jungle and in caves. The destruction caused by American bombing along with Japanese demands for food brought about a famine which was so severe that it pushed Palauans to a level of poverty previously unimaginable.

This work brings together Palauan oral history and wartime American archival records for the first time. It recreates Palauan experiences of war and postwar reconstruction and places the experiences of Islanders in a wider historical context. Evidence from interviews with Palauans who lived through this time is integrated with information from documents of American units operating in Palau, in particular the records of Marine Aircraft Group 11, which bombed Babeldaob and Koror and of the naval military government units which administered the islands.

This dual approach is continued throughout the thesis, following Palauans through the wartime occupation of Angaur, the ending of the war and the impact of the surrender. The end of the war brought Americans to northern Palau for the first time and forced the repatriation of the Japanese. Palau was a changed world. The "hell" of the war ended and for a time there was "heaven" on earth - peace, food, medicine and safety. After occupation the US Navy took over the control of the area until its transfer to the Department of the Interior in June 1951.

The thesis examines the impact of the Palauans' first vision of powerful and rich Americans and how it affected their relationships with Americans throughout the Navy's interim government of the area. This process is examined at the ground level in order to continue the "close-in" view of the experiences of individual Palauans, to understand what postwar reconstruction looked and felt like to them, and how they responded to the changes brought about by the transition from Japanese to American administration.

The work follows an historical rather than anthropological approach in that it reconstructs the activities, feelings, and daily life of some Palauans during the war and postwar period and does not examine the impact of this period of change on traditional Palauan social structure.

The study of the experiences of Island people during World War Two is a recent field of inquiry. Most scholars have taken either an anthropological approach or have focussed on salvaging Islanders' recollections. This study differs in that it is less concerned with Palauans' representations of the war and postwar experience, and more interested in the experience as it was lived. It also demonstrates that 15 August 1945 was not the end of the war in terms of its impact on the lives of Palauans.

Declaration

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

I give consent that a copy of this thesis will be available for loan and photocopying when deposited in the University Library.

Karen R. Walter
October 1993

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**The oldest hath borne most: we that are young
Shall never see so much.....**

William Shakespeare, *King Lear* Act V, Scene III.

**This work is dedicated to the Palauans who lived through
this time and to their children and grandchildren in faith
that they will never see such suffering.**



Conventions

The initial footnote reference to each Palauan interviewee lists full details of name, sex, date of birth, date and location of interview. Thereafter within the same chapter only the name is given. When the person appears for the first time in a new chapter the name, sex and date of birth are given as a reminder.

Some sources such as Military Government/Civil Administration Reports and unpublished transcripts of interviews are unpaginated. Relevant footnote references are given without page numbers.

In US Army convention abbreviations of unit numbers are often written 3d rather than 3rd.

There are variant spellings for most Palauan place names. I have used the most common spellings, i.e. Babeldaob rather than Babelthuap, Palau rather than Belau. Different spellings appear at times within quotations.

Australian spelling is used throughout except when quoting American sources and American and Palauan informants.

Introduction

A DROP IN THE OCEAN
Islanders, War and History.

The reason why I am saying that I hate war is because of that time. From the time that I went inside the cave until the time I came out of the cave, I want to show how I feel, let everybody know, anybody know, that I was in Angaur during the time of the war.

Mathias Akitaya¹

It was the suffering, the agonising time during the war that I will never forget because that was the toughest hunger I have ever gone through. It was like a famine. The thought of that time and what we had to go through just to survive with our children - that's the thing I will never forget.

Saruang Bekemekmad²

Maybe it was just my time to be so devastated and poor.

Kiari Yaoch³

During the Japanese time it was like being in a small Japanese city and then the war came and you come back and you think you are in a different world.

Father Felix Yaoch⁴

*

"I'll tell you all my ideas about Looking-glass House. First there's the room you can see through the glass...only the things go the other way...the books are something like our books, only the words go the wrong way...How would you like to live in Looking-glass House?...it's very like our passage as far as you can see, only you know it may be quite different on beyond...Let's pretend the glass has got all soft like gauze, so that we can get through".

In another moment Alice was through the glass, and had jumped lightly down into the Looking-glass room...Then she began looking about, and noticed that what could be seen...was as different as possible.

*Through The Looking-Glass
and what Alice found there*
Lewis Carroll

¹Mathias Akitaya (M 1928) : KRW Interview 28 November 1990, Koror, Palau.

²Saruang Bekemekmad (W 1915) : KRW Interview 31 October 1990, Senior Citizen's Center (SCC), Koror, Palau.

³Kiari Yaoch (W 1910) : KRW Interview 16 November 1990, SCC, Koror, Palau.

⁴Father Felix Yaoch (M 1932) : KRW Interview 23 November 1990, Koror, Palau.

On the afternoon before Guy Fawkes Day Alice chose to step through the Looking-glass into the disturbing, back to front world on the other side.⁵ When things fell into too much "dreadful confusion" and she could no longer stand it, the dream ended and she was returned safely back into her own familiar room.⁶

At dawn on 30 March 1944, moments before Koror was bombed into flames, the inhabitants of the Palau Islands had no such choice. Their passage through war was inescapable and there was no return from the "different world" on the other side.

Palau stepped into World War Two as a result of a series of strategic decisions made by American forces in their leapfrog advance across the Central Pacific. Key Japanese-held islands were selected and seized, transformed into bases and used as launching pads for further invasions, gradually making a path to the Japanese home islands. In January 1944, Admiral Nimitz's Central Pacific forces were set to target islands in the Marshalls, Marianas and Carolines. The details of the proposed advance changed numerous times during the first half of 1944. In March it was decided that the powerful Japanese naval base at Truk was best bypassed and the large island of Babeldaob in the Palau group should be taken as the principal base in that area. It was to be a large assault. Babeldaob would be attacked by four divisions, three Army and one Marine, with another Army division in reserve.⁷

Had this plan been followed, the character of the war for the vast majority of Palau's people would have been completely different. As it turned out, reconnaissance flights in June revealed that, of the estimated 37,000 Japanese troops in the Palaus, more than half were on Babeldaob. To attack Babeldaob "would not be worth what it

⁵See explanatory notes to Alice's comment "Do you know what tomorrow is?" It was supposedly 5 November, Guy Fawkes Day, as Alice goes on to mention a big bonfire in the square. Roger Lancelyn Green (ed) - Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking-Glass and what Alice found there*. (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1991) p. 266n.

⁶Ibid. pp. 237-238.

⁷See summaries of the Central Pacific Drive in The 81st Wildcat Division Historical Committee, *The 81st Infantry Wildcat Division in World War II*. (Infantry Journal Press, Washington DC, 1948) pp. 46-47, & School of Naval Administration, *Handbook on the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands: A Handbook for Use in Training and Administration*. (Navy Department, Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Washington DC, 1948) p. 83, & R.A.C. Parker, *Struggle for Survival - The History of the Second World War*. (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1990) p. 224.

would cost", so the decision was made to take the more lightly defended southern islands of Angaur and Peleliu instead.⁸ These two islands would provide air and sea bases for attacks further west into the Philippines, and Babeldaob would be bypassed, its defending forces neutralized through constant air attacks from the southern bases. The operations to invade Peleliu and then Angaur were planned for September 1944, after the seizure and occupation of Saipan, Tinian and Guam in the Marianas.⁹ Palau's war history was mapped.

This thesis opens on the morning of 30 March 1944 and follows a number of Palauans through their experiences of the first American carrier strike on the islands. This attack, and those that followed from June to September, began the transformation of Palau before American soldiers ever set foot on Palauan soil. Japanese preparations for war and American "softening up" strikes disrupted ordinary life. While the experience of bombing was new and frightening for all Palauans, the extent of people's understanding of why it was happening varied. This resulted from the nature of the thirty year Japanese administration of Palau.

Japan took the Micronesian Islands from Germany peacefully during the First World War and was granted a League of Nations mandate over the area in 1920. The *Nan'yo Cho*, or South Seas Government, was inaugurated in 1922 with its headquarters on Koror in the Palau Islands. The Japanese occupation of Palau, as of the rest of Micronesia, was characterised by economic development and a large influx of Japanese immigrants, many into the administrative centre. Under Japanese administration Palauans became third class citizens in their own island, and the traditional political system "descended into darkness" under Japanese direct rule.¹⁰ Although all Palauans had to learn the Japanese language, and many worked for Japanese employers, only a few held positions, all low-level, within the administration.

⁸The 81st Infantry Wildcat Division Historical Committee, p. 46.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰ The words of one of Koror's chiefs as quoted by Karen L. Nero in "Time of Famine, Time of Transformation : Hell in the Pacific, Palau." in Geoffrey White and Lamont Lindstrom (ed.), *The Pacific Theater : Island Representations of World War Two*. (Pacific Islands Monograph Series No. 8, University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu, 1989) p. 123.

When "the first war" came in March, people's foreknowledge about what was going to happen varied. No Palauan had experienced modern warfare but, depending on their contact with the Japanese, some had a conception that a "war" was coming to Palau. Others knew nothing. Where people were on 30 March, and what they knew, influenced what they did and felt.

On 15 September 1944, American troops landed on the southern island of Peleliu. Two days later, the 81st Infantry Division began its assault on Angaur. Many Angaurese had been evacuated to Babeldaob, but over 180 Islanders remained in refuge on the island.¹¹ Palauans on Angaur and Babeldaob had different experiences of war, their separate war histories decided by American strategy. For those on Angaur, descent into the hell of war was immediate and intense, but, in comparison to the long drawn out air war over Babeldaob, short-lived. The people of Angaur came out onto the other side of war before the rest of Palau. After the Japanese surrender a year later, Koror and Babeldaob were occupied without ground combat.

World War Two was a violent catalyst of change for Palauans, and in their first sight of Americans and their initial attempts to communicate and understand, they found themselves truly on the other side of the looking-glass. They stepped through into a changed world. At first many saw it as a kind of "heaven", after the "hell" of the war. Food and medicine were plentiful and they needed no longer to fear the planes overhead. Soon, however, people found that in this new world, many things did not make sense and expectations were almost always overturned.

After occupation and the repatriation of the Japanese in Palau, the "interim" nature of the postwar Navy Administration and the troubles of its personnel were central factors in consolidating feelings of uncertainty and confusion. The war was over but its repercussions continued in the changes wrought on the land and the people. Americans acted differently from the Japanese. They showed other ways of doing and seeing. Democracy and freedom were new concepts for Palauans and they offered a different lifestyle, one that some people embraced and others feared. Palauans took

¹¹Not all were Palauan. The group also included some Chamorros, Trukese, Yapese and Ulithians. See Chapter Two.

different directions, sought different futures. Some found, like Alice, that they were often 'running to stand still' or that by going in one direction they were really heading in another.¹²

Little research has been published on Palauan experiences during the Second World War. In September 1993 only two articles dealt specifically with the impact of war in Palau. Karen Nero's "Time of Famine, Time of Transformation : Hell in the Pacific, Palau" appeared in a collection of articles examining Islander representations of the war published in 1989.¹³ The article raises interesting points about Palauan attitudes towards Japanese and Americans, and provides a brief description of wartime experiences, focussing on Babeldaob. Some Palauan accounts of the war are quoted, mostly collected in 1985, during Nero's research for her PhD thesis, a study of the re-establishment of the chiefly system of government in Koror.¹⁴ Her focus in the article is anthropological in that she is interested in "Palauan histories and understandings of the war" : oral tradition, songs, stories, the ways in which Palauans represent their own history, collective rather than individual memories.¹⁵ She is also concerned with Islanders' perceptions of the Japanese and American "other" and of themselves.

The second article, Wakako Higuchi's "War in Palau : Morikawa and the Palauans", was published in a collection of papers resulting from a conference at the East-West Center at the University of Hawaii in 1988.¹⁶ This paper is based on Higuchi's earlier work in three unpublished oral history projects. The first of these projects, *An Oral Historiography of the Japanese Administration*, was collaborative.¹⁷

¹²Green (ed.), Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, pp. 137-141 & 144-145.

¹³Nero, "Time of Famine..." in White and Lindstrom (ed.), pp. 117-147.

¹⁴Karen L. Nero, *A Cherechar A Lokelii : Beads of History of Koror, Palau 1783-1983*. (PhD dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1987).

¹⁵Nero, "Time of Famine..." in White and Lindstrom (ed.), p. 119.

¹⁶Wakako Higuchi, "War in Palau : Morikawa and the Palauans." in Geoffrey White (ed.), *Remembering the Pacific War*. (Occasional Paper 36, Center for Pacific Island Studies, University of Hawaii, Honolulu, 1991) pp. 145-156.

¹⁷Wakako Higuchi, "Micronesians and the Pacific War : The Palauans." in Dirk A. Ballendorf, Donald M. Shuster and Wakako Higuchi, *An Oral Historiography of the Japanese Administration in Palau*. Final Report submitted to the Japan Foundation Institutional Project Support Program (Unpublished Transcript, Micronesian Area Research Center [MARC], University of Guam, October 1986).

Higuchi, Dirk Ballendorf and Donald Shuster, with the help of other colleagues, interviewed a large number of Palauans about their experiences under the Japanese. All transcripts of interviews, many collected by taking notes rather than tape recordings¹⁸, are presented in the final unpublished report, along with summaries and remarks on some of the issues raised. The project includes some discussion of war experiences. In her second oral history project, *Micronesians and the Pacific War : Interviews with Palauans*, Higuchi focussed her interviewing on men who were members of the *Giyu-Kirikomi-tai*, a corps of Palauans trained by the Japanese military.¹⁹ A third companion project comprised interviews with former Japanese government and military officials.²⁰

In the published article resulting from her research, Higuchi's approach is historical. Her main area of interest was Palauan relations with the Japanese and her interviews therefore centred around Islanders who had close contact with the Japanese through their employment. The article therefore depicts one aspect of the wartime experiences of part of Palau's population. Interviews with Japanese officials of the South Seas Bureau and the military are used to elucidate information from Palauan informants as well as to set the scene from the Japanese point of view. Reflecting her concern with Japanese-Palauan relations, Higuchi's archival research is based principally on Japanese records. Her most fascinating work is connected with the 'myth of Morikawa'²¹, a thread of which I picked up in my own interviews. She juxtaposes Palauan memories of this Japanese officer, who became a mythical figure, with information from an interview she conducted with Morikawa himself.

¹⁸Ballendorf, Shuster and Higuchi, p. 3. Noting of interviews has the disadvantage that any error of interpretation or mishearing is preserved as part of the original and only written transcription. Tape recording of interviews offers the advantage of double-checking through its preservation of the informants own exact words and intonation.

¹⁹Wakako Higuchi, *Micronesians and the Pacific War : Interviews with Palauans*. (Oral Historiographical Project sponsored by the Japan Foundation, Typescript, MARC, University of Guam, 1986).

²⁰Wakako Higuchi, *Micronesians under Japanese Administration: Interviews with Former South Seas Bureau and Military Officials*. (Oral Historiographical Project sponsored by The L.J. Skaggs and Mary C. Skaggs Foundation, California, Typescript, MARC, 1987).

²¹Higuchi, "War in Palau..." in White (ed.), pp. 149-156.

The only other published work on the war in Palau also appears in the East-West Center conference collection. This is a transcript of a short verbal presentation given by a Palauan man, Ubal Tellei. It comprises Tellei's recollections of his experiences during the war, serving with the Japanese military in New Guinea.²²

Historical research and publication in the broader area of Pacific Islanders' experiences of war has been intermittent until recently. Anthropologists and researchers worked in Micronesia and Melanesia in the period immediately after the war²³, but there were limits placed on their use of written documentation by the thirty year rule with regard to declassification of official documents. In 1968, Ken Inglis presented a paper at the Second Waigani Seminar in Port Moresby, entitled "War, Race and Loyalty in New Guinea, 1939-1945".²⁴ Most of the insights into New Guinean experiences in this paper were drawn from official histories, military memoirs and the postwar work of anthropologists. At that time Inglis suggested that "Historians so far have not written much about native responses to the war".²⁵ This is still largely true. Over the last 25 years only a few substantial works on Islanders at war have been published by historians.²⁶

Before discussing some of these works it is important to set out briefly the historical approach I have taken in this thesis. My aim is to recreate a picture of the experience of war and reconstruction in Palau through the voices of a number of Islanders. Oral history alone can reveal previously hidden aspects of the experience.

²²Ubal Tellei, "Palauans and the Japanese Military Experience." in White (ed.), pp. 157-160.

²³For example Margaret Mead, K.E. Read, J. P. McAuley and Ian Hogbin in New Guinea and John Useem, John Embree and Felix Keesing in Micronesia. See Bibliography for details.

²⁴Ken Inglis, "War, Race and Loyalty in New Guinea, 1939-1945." in *The History of Melanesia*. Papers delivered at the Second Waigani Seminar, Port Moresby 30 May to 5 June 1968 (Research School of Pacific Studies, The Australian National University & The University of Papua and New Guinea, Canberra & Port Moresby, 1969) pp. 503-529. This article was republished as Ken Inglis, "With their Fuzzy Wuzzy Hair...Myth and Reality, 1939-45." in *New Guinea and Australia, the Pacific and South-East Asia Quarterly*, Volume 3, September-October 1968, pp. 23-38.

²⁵Inglis, "War, Race and Loyalty...", p. 513.

²⁶The following literature survey concerns substantial works relevant to my approach in this thesis. In the period 1968-1993, other writers have produced articles on various war related subjects or made passing reference to the war in works concerned with other issues. For an overview of these see list of references to Lamont Lindstrom and Geoffrey M. White, "War Stories", Chapter One in White and Lindstrom (ed.), pp. 36-40.

There is value in pure salvage and verbatim transcription of people's memories. However, by using both oral evidence and written records together the picture can be rounded out further. Throughout I attempt to discover connections between the inside memories of Palauans and the outside records. These connections corroborate, strengthen and enlighten the memories of individuals.

In my use of oral history I see a distinction between oral tradition and oral evidence. In oral societies like Palau, versions of history are contained within oral stories handed down through generations. These stories become a collective history and can take on mythic elements.²⁷ Oral evidence is individual memories - what I did, what I saw, what I felt. This approach reveals the actions and feelings of individual people. By finding connections between individual stories we can begin to build a complete picture.

The constraints of declassification made this dual approach to war history, (using oral evidence and written records), impossible until the early 1970s.²⁸ Some historians therefore saw the special value of using oral evidence to reconstruct Islanders' war experiences. At the 1968 Waigani Seminar, Don Barrett presented a paper on the Pacific Island Regiment describing the recruitment, training and some of the action seen by this first group of Papuan soldiers.²⁹ Islanders' recollections form part of the background for the short paper and Barrett wrote that "one would hope that before all the fine old soldiers of Papuan and New Guinean Battalions forget some effort will be made to record their exploits".³⁰

Asesela Ravuvu's book, *Fijians at War*, published in 1974, in some ways answered Barrett's call.³¹ Ravuvu "records the exploits" of Fijians who were recruited to go to the war. The violence of war did not come to Fiji, or directly affect the home island, except in its use as a forward base. Through interviews with men who enlisted

²⁷Such as the "myth of Morikawa", discussed in Chapter Three.

²⁸Except where official histories or memoirs were used, as in Inglis' work.

²⁹Don Barrett, "The Pacific Islands Regiment" in *The History of Melanesia*. pp. 493-502.

³⁰Ibid. p. 500.

³¹Asesela Ravuvu, *Fijians at War*. (Institute of Pacific Studies, Suva, 1974).

in the military in labour battalions and rifle companies, Ravuvu explores Fijian responses to war. He follows the men through enlistment and training, through their experiences in campaigns in the Solomons and New Guinea and finally to the difficulties they found in coming home and settling into ordinary life.

Seven years later, Neville Robinson made extensive use of oral history to look at the experiences of Islander civilians as well as men recruited by the military, in his work on Papua New Guinean villagers at war.³² Robinson looks at the varied responses of Islanders to war in their own land. He examines the attitudes of people in three villages towards the Japanese and the Allies. His approach is closest to my own. He uses oral history to allow people to tell their own story, to provide the narrative, immediacy and feeling, but also uses ANGAU (Australian New Guinea Administrative Unit) patrol reports and other written records to provide background and context for oral accounts. He looks at the many roles Islanders played during the war, as victims, as labourers and carriers. He describes responses to bombing raids and reactions to contact with Japanese and Allied soldiers. The experiences of people from the three villages differed because of where the villages were located and how directly they were affected by the Japanese invasion.

The next substantial body of work on Islanders at war appeared in 1988 and was focussed on the salvage and direct publication of Islander recollections. *The Big Death, Solomon Islanders Remember World War II* was published bilingually, in English and a Solomon Islands vernacular, and it presents "a sample of a wide body of oral narrative representing the many diverse experiences of Solomon Islanders during World War II".³³ The book attempts to turn the historiographical tables.

Because the metropolitan powers, - the Allied forces and Japan - made the islands their battleground, it is their voices that have dominated the retelling of World War II events. But other voices also speak of wartime experiences - the voices of Solomon Islanders whose stories now make up a rich oral tradition of war history. This

³²Neville Robinson, *Villagers at War : Some Papua New Guinean Experiences in World War II*. (Pacific Research Monograph No. 2, Australian National University, Canberra, 1981).

³³*The Big Death, Solomon Islanders Remember World War II*. (Solomon Islands College of Higher Education and the University of the South Pacific, Honiara & Suva, 1988) pp. 127-128.

book is devoted to those voices, to bringing them to the attention of audiences beyond the storytellers' circle.³⁴

A special issue of *O'O : A Journal of Solomon Island Studies* - "Taem Belong Faet: World War II in Melanesia", published in the same year, is devoted to adding more to this collection and also includes overview articles and some commentary on Islanders' accounts.³⁵

In 1989, Geoffrey White, co-editor of the *O'O* Special issue, joined Lamont Lindstrom to edit a broader study of Pacific Islanders at war. *The Pacific Theater : Island Representations of World War II*, brings together 18 scholars, mainly anthropologists, working on Islander experiences of the war across the Pacific. In their introduction the editors state the 'twofold purpose' of the collection,

to examine the significance of wartime experiences within the framework of island cultures and to examine island cultures within the frameworks imposed by war.³⁶

This description encapsulates the anthropological focus of the work on "island cultures" rather than individuals and on the war as a motivator of cultural change. As the title of the collection suggests, the contributors are interested in defining the way in which Islanders "represent" or remember the war and the ways that "World War II has sedimented into an intense - if narrow - band in the stratigraphy of social and individual histories".³⁷ In a review of this collection, historian Hank Nelson points out that the anthropologists' main concern is to show "how Islanders locate war-time meetings within their social and value systems".³⁸ He also comments on the amount of space devoted to "what Islanders thought of war-time Americans".³⁹ For many Islanders the

³⁴Ibid. p. 127.

³⁵Hugh Laracy and Geoffrey White (ed.), "Taem Belong Faet : World War II in Melanesia." Special Issue of *O'O : A Journal of Solomon Island Studies*; No. 4, 1988.

³⁶White and Lindstrom (ed.), p. 4.

³⁷Ibid. p. 3.

³⁸Hank Nelson, Review Article, "Turning the Talk of War into History." in *Journal of Pacific History*, Vol. 25, No. 2, 1990, p. 265.

³⁹Ibid.

war brought contact with new outsiders and the anthropologists in this volume aim to understand how Islanders interpreted these "others" and how they placed them in their "histories" of the war.

The Pacific Theater includes only one work on Palau (Nero's), amongst three others on Micronesia, five on the Solomons, two focussing on New Guinea and one each on Samoa and Vanuatu. In going through the articles, the reader finds many insights and commonalities of experience which can be traced across the Pacific. The collection provides an important picture of the "watershed" event of World War II and the ways in which different groups of Islanders were involved and affected, and particularly how Islanders represent war and change. What is lacking in this collection, however, is the historian's eye.

As Hank Nelson states "For a book concerned with events of nearly fifty years ago, there is little evidence of the use of documents in the list of sources".⁴⁰ The contributors make limited use of any written evidence and what is used is almost entirely secondary, rather than primary and archival. Only six of the writers use any primary documentation and the only one to make extensive use of archival material is James Boutilier, the only historian represented in the volume.⁴¹ The wonderful amount of material collected from interviews with Islanders would have been better rounded out and placed in historical context with more use of written evidence.⁴² By looking more closely at what was going on outside "island culture", scholars could have seen more clearly some of the other causes of what was happening inside the culture. The contributors also "have not exploited narrative as effectively as they might".⁴³ As the focus of many of the articles is how history is told in oral accounts, Islanders' individual stories are often lost.

⁴⁰Ibid. p. 266.

⁴¹James A. Boutilier, "Kennedy's 'Army' ": Solomon Islanders at War, 1942-1943." Chapter 14 in White and Lindstrom (ed.), pp. 329-352.

⁴²Hank Nelson in his review even points out some "errors of fact and omission". Nelson, p. 266.

⁴³Ibid. p. 267.

The second recent collection of papers, *Remembering the Pacific War*, is the outcome of a conference on *Cultural Encounters in the Pacific War* held at the East-West Center in 1988.⁴⁴ It reflects the two main streams of recent research in the field: the salvage of Islanders' recollections and the work of anthropologists. It does, however, contain four contributions from historians. Their articles reveal the value of historical context, gleaned from documents, in understanding the background of Islanders' motivations.⁴⁵

John Waiko, historian and member of the community about which he writes, discusses the sensitivity with which any researcher needs to approach the writing of the history of the war, especially when using oral evidence.⁴⁶

I believe that any person who enters a community and writes about it must meet this double role seriously. The conflict is between writing for the people and writing for the university establishment. I have tried to ensure in my own case that the two are balanced as evenly as possible.⁴⁷

There is also a dual role when one is writing a history of war and reconstruction for the people involved, based on their recollections, as well as producing a document which will reveal these people's experiences to a wider audience. The use of Islander oral history in combination with Western written sources meets the needs of this approach. It is going outside to get further inside. As Waiko found in his research,

[While] villagers knew little of the broad strategic flow of the war or the reasons that either side gave for their violence, they made perceptive statements about their own actions and attitudes.⁴⁸

⁴⁴White (ed.).

⁴⁵For example, Brij Lal, establishing the setting of the time, gives a balanced view of the reasons why Fijians were eager to enlist to help the British Empire and Indians were not. See Brij Lal, "For King and Country : A talk on the Pacific War in Fiji." in *Ibid.* pp. 17-25. Similarly Hugh Laracy, by describing the personal and situational circumstances of the convicted Solomon Islands "traitor", George Bogese, provides another way of looking at his actions. See Hugh Laracy, "George Bogese : 'Just a Bloody Traitor?'" in White (ed.), pp. 59-75.

⁴⁶John Waiko, "Oral History and the War : The View from Papua New Guinea" in White (ed.), pp. 3-16.

⁴⁷*Ibid.* p. 5.

⁴⁸*Ibid.* p. 15.

Palauans too are very aware of what they felt and how they reacted to war and are clear in expressing it. However it is also important to set out the reality of the circumstances of the war for two reasons. Combining evidence of "actions and attitudes" with context and reasons strengthens Islanders' testimonies and provides a deeper understanding of, and can sometimes change, the meaning of Islanders' responses.

For example, if two people in different places experience an earthquake, both may describe it as the most terrifying experience of their lives. If we find that one earthquake was a tremor and the other was 7.5 on the Richter scale we can discover new meanings. Firstly we can get clear evidence of the impact of each intensity of earthquake on individuals and on their immediate surroundings. Secondly we learn more about the individuals by seeing how they responded in their different situations.

An examination of inside reactions and outside context also divulges much about the long drawn out year of bombing over Babeldaob. Palauans recall the unfailing regularity of the planes that came over bombing and strafing. No researcher has ever looked at American bombing records to assess the timing and severity of raids. How often and what times did the planes come? What were their main targets? A study of the records of the Marine squadrons operating over Palau adds strength to Palauan testimony by corroborating the systematic routine of the bombing runs and the intensity of their strikes.⁴⁹ Looking at the pattern of American bombing from only the American perspective, there is no conception of the damage and suffering caused. Using oral testimony alone, we see the responses but do not clearly know what they are a reaction to. Bringing the two sources together provides new insights into the significance of Palauans' responses.

Just as this dual approach has been largely absent in works on Islanders, particularly Micronesians, at war, it is also missing in the small body of work on postwar reconstruction in Micronesia. The postwar naval government of these islands has been thoroughly examined by the naval official historian, Dorothy Richard, in a

⁴⁹See Chapter Three.

three volume series published in the 1950s.⁵⁰ However, this is a history from the Navy's perspective and it covers the entire Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands. These qualifications result in a survey work which is an excellent source on what policies, procedures and programmes the Navy established during this time, but does not give any picture of the influence of these developments on Islanders. The Navy's work is almost always regarded in a positive light and some less favourable issues are not addressed.⁵¹ Islanders' voices appear only in occasional quotes, and as the work is covering such a broad geographic area, comments on Palau are few and brief.

Two other good resource works, handbooks produced as aids for civil affairs personnel, show what Navy officers knew and were expected to learn about Micronesia. The first, a wartime publication, was a Civil Affairs handbook for the Western Carolines area, the second a manual produced at the School of Naval Administration at Stanford for use by students and graduates posted to the Trust Territory.⁵²

The only other works to examine this period are either broad works which include a section on the naval government period⁵³, or articles written by American observers in the 1940s and 1950s.⁵⁴ The most informative of the latter are by researchers who visited and worked in Palau after the war. John Useem, who was

⁵⁰Dorothy Richard, *United States Naval Administration of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands*. (In three volumes, Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Washington DC, 1957).

⁵¹For example, Richard glosses over the problems caused by alcohol usage in Micronesia. She only states that the use of intoxicants was prevalent in Micronesia and that daily use was "not common" and there were only a few "confirmed drinkers". See Richard, *Volume III : The Trusteeship period 1947-1951*, p. 485. This is broadly true. Yet there is no mention of the severe problems in Palau despite the fact that in June 1950 the Civil Administrator of the Palau district, Commander Curtis, specifically forwarded to Richard a petition from the women of Palau entitled "The Evil of Drink" which gave graphic evidence of the trouble and distress caused by alcohol abuse. See *Memorandum From Civil Administrator, Palau District to LCDR Dorothy Richard : Petition (the Evil of Drink) Forwarding of*, 19 June 1950 (RG 313, Records of the Naval Operating Forces, Box 6930, National Archives - Suitland, Maryland). This document is quoted and discussed in Chapter Six.

⁵²US Navy Department, *Civil Affairs Handbook : West Caroline Islands*. (Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Washington DC, 1944) & School of Naval Administration, *Handbook on the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands...*

⁵³For examples among other works see Harold F. Nufer, *Micronesians Under American Rule*. (Exposition Press, New York, 1978) & Robert Trumbull, *Paradise in Trust : A Report on Americans in Micronesia 1946-1958*. (William Sloan Associates, New York, 1959).

⁵⁴See numerous articles published journals in the 1940-50 period, primarily *Far Eastern Survey* and *Human Organization*. See Bibliography.

military government officer on Angaur and then returned to Palau as an anthropologist, wrote a large number of articles on military government and relations between Palauans and Americans, in the 1940s and 1950s.⁵⁵ His insights, as participant and observer, are unique, and his work has been consulted extensively for this thesis.

My approach to the period of reconstruction utilizes Palauan testimony in conjunction with American records, particularly the war diaries of the occupying forces and the reports and correspondence of the navy military government/civil administration unit in Koror. This allows Palauan responses to be put into the context of what was happening around them, what Americans were doing and intending to do at ground level.

Beyond using this dual approach, this thesis differs from work which precedes it in two important ways. Firstly, it has a narrow focus on Palau, rather than the whole of Micronesia or the Pacific area. It is the first major piece of historical work to concentrate on the wartime period in one island group in Micronesia. It fills in a gap in the history of World War II for both Palauans and Americans. Such a focus in this work and the limitations of space, however, mean that I do not include comparisons or contrasts with other areas of the Pacific. As in *The Pacific Theater* collection, it is possible to find many commonalities of experience between island groups. This is an area for further research.

Secondly, I examine Palauan experiences of both war and postwar reconstruction, revealing an indelible connection between the two. I believe the period of Navy government cannot be understood without looking at its roots in the war, just as Palauans' reactions to Americans must be placed in the context of the time of suffering through which they had just passed. The chronological approach, looking at change over time, allows further insight into Palauan responses.

Anthropologist DeVerne Reed Smith introduces her study of Palauan social structure with the statement that "Palau has become famous among students of Pacific societies as the possessor of one of the region's most complex and baffling social

⁵⁵See Bibliography for list of Useem's works.

systems".⁵⁶ As I am not an anthropologist, I make no attempt to relate Palauans' reactions to war and postwar events to the intricacies of Palauan social structure, kinship patterns and customary behaviour. Much good anthropological work has been completed on "traditional" Palau,⁵⁷ and to recreate now a picture of Palauan culture in 1944 would be an extremely difficult task. Administration by three successive western occupiers - Spain, Germany and Japan - induced many changes and broke down institutions. In his 1949 study, *Political Factionalism in Palau*, Arthur Viditch stressed that "Each period [of occupation] imposed certain changes in the social structure which altered the situation confronted by the following administration".⁵⁸ Spain "viewed Palau as a missionaries' frontier" and targeted religious and moral practices and warfare.⁵⁹ With its interest in trade, Germany "focused on native production methods and social controls".⁶⁰ The Japanese administration saw Palau's value in its economic potential as well as in its capacity to be colonised by large numbers of Japanese immigrants.⁶¹ This vision meant that "the most far-reaching alterations in Palauan culture came about under the Japanese regime".⁶² The administration dissolved the power structure, interfered with land ownership and distribution, and re-educated Palauans in language, behaviour and loyalty.

The immense impact of the Japanese on many integral aspects of Palauan culture meant that by 1944 the "traditional" power structure and customary life of Palauans was severely broken down. "The Japanese wanted to do away with Palauans traditions [so]

⁵⁶DeVerne Reed Smith, *Palauan Social Structure*. (Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, 1983) p. 3.

⁵⁷This includes works by DeVerne Reed Smith, Roland Force, Arthur Viditch, John Useem, Homer Barnett and Robert McKnight. See Bibliography.

⁵⁸Arthur J. Viditch, *Political Factionalism in Palau*. (Final Report, Coordinated Investigation of Micronesian Anthropology, June 1949) p. 8.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*

⁶⁰*Ibid.*

⁶¹*Ibid.*

⁶²Roland W. Force, *Leadership and Cultural Change in Palau*. (Fieldiana Anthropology, Volume 50, Chicago Natural History Museum, Chicago, 1960) p. 72.

the clan system had very little influence" during those years.⁶³ "Political leadership and authority at the indigenous level were emasculated to a point where they virtually did not exist".⁶⁴ The confusion and destruction of the war and the even stronger controls established by the Japanese military further disintegrated Palauan leadership and disrupted the Palauan way of life.⁶⁵ Therefore at the end of the war, when Americans occupied the whole of Palau, "traditional" ways of living had been pushed aside by the war and Palauan systems of control were at their "weakest point".⁶⁶

For these reasons, it is largely impossible to provide a reliable summary of Palauan culture in the mid 1940s. However, it is valuable to set out some basic motivations and qualities which have threaded their way through the Palauan way of life, despite and because of four successive administrations. Viditch calls these aspects, "cultural configurations" and explains that they are "part of the social heritage of a group" and they influence the Palauan "manner of doing things" and "the goals for which they strive". These traits "may still persist even when the cultural context is changed considerably".⁶⁷ The most significant is "the prestige orientation of the culture".⁶⁸ Many Palauans strive to gain prestige. The competitive and fluid nature of the power structure means that a person's status and the amount of authority he or she commands can change. "Traditionally" Palauan society had a hierarchical structure, so in conjunction with this desire for prestige is a strong respect for status rights and an awareness of obligations. Palau is divided into two confederations traditionally headed

⁶³Ltr. from Maura Gordon, a Palauan woman who gave some assistance in my oral history project, 12 May 1991, Belau National Museum, Koror, Palau.

⁶⁴Ibid.

⁶⁵Mark Peattie's, *Nan'yo : The Rise and Fall of the Japanese in Micronesia 1885-1945*. (Pacific Islands Monograph Series No. 4, University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu, 1988) includes an examination of the wartime period in Micronesia from the perspective of the Japanese, primarily using Japanese records. This account shows the roles and reactions of Micronesians through Japanese eyes and provides a good background to understanding contemporary life in the islands. The writings of Thirties and Forties observers Paul Clyde, Tadao Yanaihara and Willard Price provide an overview of conditions in Micronesia under prewar administration. See Bibliography.

⁶⁶Ltr. from Maura Gordon.

⁶⁷Viditch, p. 17.

⁶⁸Ibid.

by the two high chiefs, Aibedul and Reklai. A structure of "opposing forces" and competition seeps down into many aspects of the culture. Equally important, and in balance to this, is the principle of "reciprocity" - the exchange of services, gifts and economic goods.⁶⁹

The importance of the quest for prestige has allowed Palauans to adapt to different foreign regimes. "In the eyes of the Palauan the foreigner offers things which are deemed valuable...as instruments for attainment of prestige and influence".⁷⁰ Palauans are also regarded as "forward looking" people.⁷¹

The intruding culture, whether Spanish, German, Japanese or American, has generally been perceived as advanced, modern, even better. Palauans have recognized that...modernism often confers power, prestige, and wealth.⁷²

Although Palauans have accepted change and adapted to it, this does not mean that everyone desired it or adjusted to it in the same way. "Cultural configurations" only offer guidelines to understanding the reactions of some Palauans. Throughout this thesis I approach Palauans as individuals, rather than as stereotypical "Palauans". I emphasize the different responses of people of different ages and of women in comparison with men. The places people stayed during the war and where they resettled afterwards are also relevant to the nature of their individual experiences.

The sources for this work, as mentioned earlier, are twofold. My aim throughout is to find connections between the two. While in Palau in October and November 1990, I conducted interviews with 43 Palauans, 22 women and 21 men ranging in age (at 1944) from 6 to 44. People from Koror, Peleliu, Angaur and most districts on Babeldaob were interviewed in Palauan, with the aid of an interpreter.⁷³ A number of

⁶⁹Ibid. p. 18.

⁷⁰Ibid.

⁷¹Donald R. Shuster, *Islands of Change in Palau : Church, School and Elected Government, 1891-1981* (PhD dissertation, University of Hawaii, 1982) p. 13.

⁷²Ibid. pp. 12-13.

⁷³Camella Ngirausui was interpreter for the majority of interviews, except on Angaur where Rusk Saburo was interpreter. On two occasions other interpreters were used : Susan Ngaum, Maura Gordon and one other person who wished to remain anonymous. A tape recorder was used for interviews. I always asked the person being interviewed if she or he were happy for me to record our talk. Only on one occasion did an interviewee feel uncomfortable about it, so on this occasion, I took notes instead.

English speaking Palauans were also interviewed. I asked people whether they wished their names to be used and only four people wanted to remain anonymous. Most were not concerned about revealing their identity because they wanted to tell their stories, especially their experiences during the war.⁷⁴ Once word circulated that I was talking to people about this, some people asked to be interviewed. As Suzanne Falgout noted in a review article in 1990, "The Pacific Islanders who were involved in World War II feel an intense need for their voices to be heard."⁷⁵

In Palau I also interviewed Henry (Hank) Worswick, an American who was an enlisted man in the US Navy, served in the invasion of Peleliu and then worked for military government on Angaur until he sought a discharge from the service. He married a Palauan and has remained in Palau.

Between April and August 1990, while carrying out archival research in the United States and Hawaii, I conducted seven more interviews. Five were with Americans who went to Palau directly after the war or during the navy period.⁷⁶ One was with Pastor Wilhelm Fey, a German missionary in Palau from 1933 to 1955 who remained on Babeldaob during the war.⁷⁷ The seventh, a series of interviews, was with John Useem, a wartime military government officer on Angaur in 1944, who returned as a researcher in 1946 and 1948. The observations these people made provided descriptions and gave insights which helped to recreate a picture of wartime and postwar Palau.

As Donald Shuster comments, "The worth of a historian is judged by his ability to choose the relevant from the mass of chaotic detail before him and cast the relevant detail into persuasive themes".⁷⁸ Using wartime fighter squadron records required

⁷⁴The names of the Palauans interviewed are listed separately in the Bibliography.

⁷⁵Suzanne Falgout, Review Article, *O'O' Special Issue and The Big Death in The Contemporary Pacific : A Journal of Island Affairs*, Vol. 2, No. 1, Spring 1990, p. 227.

⁷⁶During 3 of these interviews the informants' wives, who had accompanied them to Palau, were present and contributed to the discussion. See Bibliography for a full list of interviews.

⁷⁷Pastor Fey's wife, Hanna, remained with him throughout this period. I was unable to interview her because of her poor health.

⁷⁸Shuster, *Islands of Change...*, p. 8.

much sifting through day by day war diary entries to discover patterns, select informative examples and make connections with Palauan testimony.⁷⁹ With regard to Navy records, however, much of the selection process was beyond the control of the historian as it had already been done by history itself. When the Navy left Palau in 1951, handing administration over to the Department of the Interior, it first "screened" and "destroyed" large quantities of material, including correspondence and dispatches.⁸⁰ Of the 75 cubic feet of records held at the Koror headquarters in June 1951, 53 cubic feet (70%), was destroyed outright. Nine cubic feet was transferred to the Department of the Interior and 13 went to the Navy records centre.⁸¹ The selection process meant that of the unclassified material "current files or correspondence and dispatches, were turned over to Interior". Of the material predating 1950 "some which was necessary for administrative purposes" was handed over, while "unnecessary material was destroyed". "Historical material" and "material of value" was retained by the Navy Department. Classified correspondence, after being "carefully screened", was treated in the same manner.⁸² Who decided what should be "screened" out and what constituted "unnecessary material" it is not clearly known, though Richard's official history mentions that the historian was "assigned the task of screening the mass of military government-civil administration files".⁸³ Hence the Navy, and not an outside agency, decided what was to become available to future historians. Judging by the state of many of the Navy records in Washington DC, and the fact that they were still classified when I came to use them, it is clear that no civilian historian has sorted

⁷⁹Records used include : *War Diary, Marine Aircraft Group Eleven* [designated MAG 11], September 1944 - January 1946. (Microfiche, F2902, Operational Archives [OA], Naval Historical Center [NHC], Washington DC), *War Diary Marine Fighter Squadron One Twenty Two* [VMF 122], April 1943 - December 1945. (Microfilm, NRS 1972-68, OA, NHC), *War Diary Marine Fighting Squadron One Twenty One* [VMF 121], September 1944 - August 1945. (Microfilm, NRS 1973-49, OA, NHC), *WWII Diary/Report File Marine Night Fighter Squadron 541* [VMF (N) 541], September 1944 - September 1945. (Microfilm, NRS 91, OA, NHC) & *Records, Marine Torpedo Bomber Squadron 134* [VMTB 134], October 1944 - August 1945. (Microfiche, F2099, OA NHC).

⁸⁰*Disposition of Files and Records* (1951), Trust Territory Archives, Microfilm Reel 804, Frame 84. (Hamilton Library, University of Hawaii, Honolulu).

⁸¹*Ibid.*

⁸²*Ibid.*

⁸³Dorothy Richard, *Volume III...*, p. 1108.

through the "chaotic detail" since it left Koror.⁸⁴ The absence of a complete record from the American point of view and the lack of personal and social detail in military record keeping⁸⁵, makes it even more important to listen to the voices of Palauan participants and American observers.⁸⁶

In a review of *The Pacific Theater*, Hugh Laracy comments that Pacific historians have allowed some of the most valuable areas of Island history "to be taken over by interlopers from other disciplines". He points out that with the publication of that collection,

predatory anthropologists by the horde seem to be taking over that prime topic area - the single most dramatic episode in the common history of the Pacific Islands - World War II.⁸⁷

With this thesis I hope to begin a correction of this omission. By looking at the war in one small island group in the Pacific, with the historian's eye for outside and inside stories, my goal is to inspire other historians to produce balanced histories of and for other groups of Islanders. I aim also to make connections between the wartime period and the tentative beginnings of the new and confusing world of peace, to see what it meant for some Palauans to find themselves on the other side of the looking glass.

⁸⁴RG 38 (Records of the Civil Affairs Military Government Branch of CNO [Chief of Naval Operations], being records from Naval Historical Center deposited at National Archives, Suitland MD, as Job No. 60-A-2109 (Location 2/70/45/4)). Although this material was organized with a clear inventory, the ground level records of the MG/CA Unit, Palau Islands and other related material in RG 313 (Records of the Naval Operating Forces, National Archives, Suitland MD), despite basic contents lists, were in a very poor condition. None of this material had been declassified and all was disorganized in dusty boxes with pages and photographs stuck together, paper clips and staples rusting. In addition to these records, the School of Naval Administration at Stanford kept copies of a large number of Monthly and Quarterly Reports from units in Micronesia. This collection is still held in a well organized manner, at the Hoover Institution at Stanford.

⁸⁵This varies greatly, depending on the character of the person assigned to write reports at the time and the individuals who were responsible for correspondence.

⁸⁶I attempted to get in touch with naval officers and enlisted men who served in the naval military government/civil administration unit by placing advertisements in *The Navy News*, and by contacting veterans organizations, but I received no replies. This remains a very interesting area for further work.

⁸⁷Hugh Laracy, Review of *The Pacific Theater...*, in *The Contemporary Pacific : A Journal of Island Affairs*, Vol. 3, No. 2 Fall 1991, p. 466.

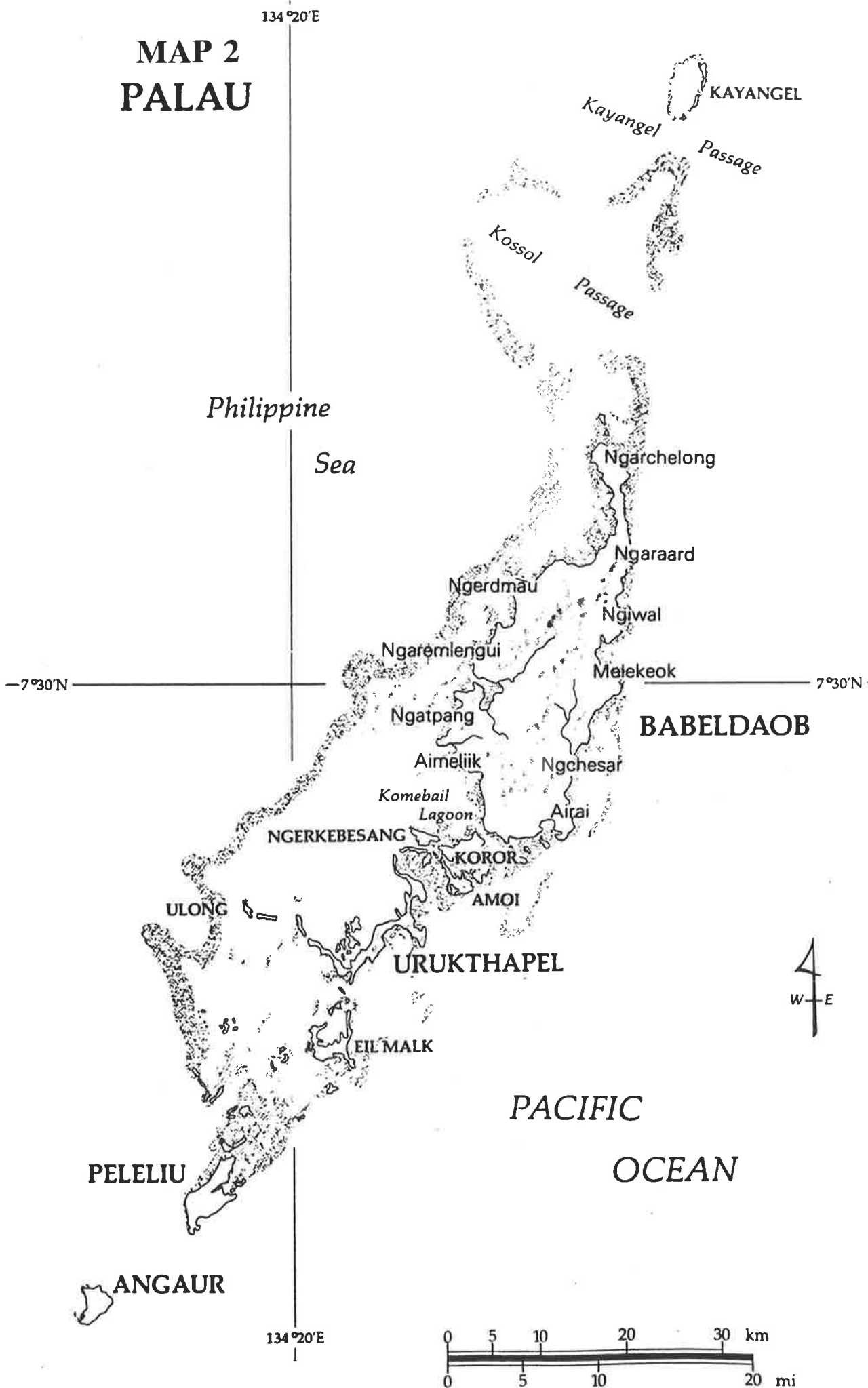
Part One

THROUGH THE GLASS DARKLY*

Palau's Passage Through War
March 1944 - August 1945

*"Through a glass darkly...", *New Testament*, Corinthians 1:12:12.

MAP 2 PALAU



Chapter One

THE FIRST WAR

Palau under Air Attack
March - September 1944.



The sun was just rising when watchman Mereb Eruang received a message that planes were approaching Koror. The Japanese soldiers with whom he was working were in radio contact with ships harboured around Babeldaob, and at 5:30 a.m. the report came through that the aircraft belonged to the enemy.¹

In the hamlet of Ngerbeched, twelve year old Felix Yaoch heard the roar of engines and ran outdoors to rejoice and welcome the new Japanese reinforcements.² The same noise woke students at the Vocational School in Koror and in surprise and confusion the boys rushed to find their instructors to ask them what was happening.³ Further north, across the channel in Airai, young Anthony Polloi shielded his eyes against the sun, and watched the planes fly towards the airstrip being built nearby. He kept losing sight of them as they disappeared into the glare of the morning.⁴

At the new airfield, Palauan workers and Japanese soldiers finished their warm-up exercises and began the day's construction work.⁵ The sound of the planes led many to look up into the sky. Seeing the shapes of aircraft emerging from the bright horizon many felt good, believing that they were Japanese planes coming to support the war effort.⁶ As the planes began to circle, some thought they were merely practising manoeuvres. Fourteen year old Minoru Ueki decided to work even harder today because the aircraft were there, showing their strength and willingness to protect

¹Mereb Eruang (M 1914) : KRW Interview 25 October 1990, Koror, Palau.

²Father Felix Yaoch (M 1932).

³Wilhelm Rengiil (M 1929) : KRW Interview 7 November 1990, Arakabesang, Palau.

⁴Dr. Anthony Polloi (M 1936) : KRW Interview 26 October 1990, Koror, Palau.

⁵Dr. Minoru Ueki (M 1930) : KRW Interview 20 November 1990, Koror, Palau. He remembers that every morning, at dawn, before they started work, everyone had to line up and do physical exercises and listen to their superiors tell them that they must work hard to help the "mother country".

⁶Man, Ngermid (1919) : KRW Interview 24 October 1990, Koror, Palau.

the Japanese and the Palauans.⁷ Another man noticed that the planes had stars on their wings.⁸

Near the airfield a young woman, Ascension Ngelmas, watched the planes circling above. Suddenly she saw flames shooting out and down from one of the aircraft towards the strip. She was afraid because it was the first time she had ever seen anything like it.⁹ A number of the planes swooped low over the runway, strafing and dropping bombs. A young man panicked and ran towards the surrounding jungle as he saw Japanese soldiers begin to fall.¹⁰ Minoru Ueki was stunned to see one of his classmates shot down right in front of him. He quickly joined the other boys in his group and they fled into the jungle.¹¹ The rest of the workers scattered in all directions. One passed near the home of Ascension Ngelmas and told her that the shots had killed a Palauan man. She became very frightened.¹²

Nearby, Benged Sechewas stared in awe as "five dark planes" skimmed over the airstrip and moments later she heard shooting begin. Her husband was one of the construction workers and she waited in fear for his return. Later she went outside and looked towards Koror and Malakal, to her home, her "original place", and she saw two bombs fall and a thick cloud of smoke blacken the sky.¹³ In the Rock Islands near Koror, a young woman watched the flames and smoke curl up from the buildings,¹⁴ while another fled into a cave, hid her head between some rocks and covered her ears in terror.¹⁵ A fifteen year old girl in Aimeliik was fascinated by the nine planes she

⁷Dr. Minoru Ueki.

⁸Temel Ngirchorachel (M 1928) : KRW Interview 27 October 1990, Koror, Palau.

⁹Ascension Ngelmas (W 1915) : KRW Interview 5 November 1990, Koror, Palau.

¹⁰Male, Ngermid.

¹¹Dr. Minoru Ueki.

¹²Ascension Ngelmas.

¹³Benged Sechewas (W 1916) : KRW Interview 24 October 1990, Koror, Palau.

¹⁴Rose Adelbai (W 1921) : KRW Interview 26 October 1990, Koror, Palau

¹⁵Delirang (W 1900) : KRW Interview 28 November 1990, Senior Citizens' Center [SCC], Koror, Palau.

could see flying in formation above Koror. She thought they were Japanese and when they started to shoot she giggled, wondering what was happening. As she watched, bombs started to explode at Malakal, the oil stored there caught fire and the flames spread out over the whole of Koror. She began to realize something terrible had happened and she ran to hide.¹⁶

Dirreou Orrukei was in the hamlet of Ngerchemai in Koror preparing to take her aunt's child to school when the raid began. She looked around in confusion, not knowing what was going on. The engines of the planes thundered above and she could hear something hitting the roof.¹⁷ At the Vocational School, Wilhelm Rengiil and the other students excitedly peered at the sky as the planes with the stars dived downwards and dropped their bombs. Japanese and American aircraft wheeled in the air firing their guns and flames blazed out from them. Although he felt a little afraid, Wilhelm was fascinated by the the noise and the activity. Seeing the empty shells drop from the aeroplanes he and his friends rushed outside to pick them up, finding that they were still hot. Their instructors ordered them back into the shelter.¹⁸

In Ngchesar, Dengelei Saburo ran out to greet the planes yelling "Banzai! Banzai!". As she watched the bombs fall on Airai and the smoke fill the sky over Koror, she became confused. Not long afterwards, some men from the airfield, who had kept running up into Babeldaob to escape, told her, "This is a war. It has started!".¹⁹

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¹⁶Mengesebuuch Yalap (W 1929) : KRW Interview 31 October 1990, Koror, Palau.

¹⁷Direou Orrukei (W 1925) : KRW Interview 19 October 1990, Koror, Palau.

¹⁸Wilhelm Rengiil.

¹⁹Dengelei Saburo (W 1930) : KRW Interview 2 November 1990, Koror, Palau.

Before dawn on 30 March 1944, carriers from the U.S. Fifth Fleet's Task Force 58 anchored at their launching site, 100 miles from the Palau group.²⁰ The primary aim of the the air strike against these islands was to provide strategic support for the coming Hollandia operation in New Guinea. The raid would destroy aircraft and shipping throughout the area to ensure that it would not be available to obstruct the planned April landings.²¹ Koror and Malakal Harbours, as well as the Kossol Passage area north of Babeldaob, were considered to be among the most important Japanese naval bases in the Central Pacific. The airfields at Peleliu and the one under construction at Airai provided facilities for Japanese aircraft to reach Hollandia.²² As well, intelligence on the Palau Islands was very limited and this strike would allow the first photographic reconnaissance of the land and surrounding waters in preparation for future operations.²³

The planes first sighted by Palauans early on the morning of 30 March were followed by hundreds more. They continued to sweep over the islands for a day and a half, ranging over the airstrips at Airai and Peleliu, shooting down any planes that flew up in resistance, strafing and bombing aircraft on the ground. That night the Japanese flew new planes in from other islands to reinforce their dwindling air defence. They were all destroyed the following morning.²⁴ During the same period, Yap, Ulithi and a number of other islands in the Western Carolines were also struck; these raids accounted for the loss of nearly 150 Japanese aircraft.²⁵

²⁰Samuel Eliot Morison, *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II Volume VIII : New Guinea and the Marianas : March 1944-August 1944*. (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1953) pp. 31-32.

²¹Morison, *Vol. VIII ...*, p. 28, & Robert Ross Smith, *United States Army in World War II. The War in the Pacific : The Approach to the Philippines*. (Center of Military History, United States Army, Washington DC, 1984) p. 49.

²²Morison, *Vol. VIII....*, p. 28.

²³*Ibid.*, & Dorothy E. Richard, *United States Naval Administration of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands, Volume 1 : The Wartime Military Government Period 1942-1945*. (Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Washington DC, 1957) p. 152.

²⁴Morison *Vol. VIII ...*, p. 32, & Wesley Frank Craven and James Lea Cate, *The Army Air Forces in World War II Volume Four, The Pacific : Guadalcanal to Saipan, August 1942 to July 1944*. (Office of Air Force History, Washington DC, 1983) pp. 603-604.

²⁵Smith, *Approach to the Philippines....*, p. 49.

Thirty six ships in Palau's Malakal Harbour, including two destroyers, four escort vessels and numerous other craft, were sunk or badly damaged. Harbour and shore defences and storage depots were strafed and demolished. Fighters fired on anti-aircraft installations, while torpedo bombers dropped mines into the two main passages leading into the Harbour, trapping many vessels within.²⁶ Although the Japanese had sighted Task Force 58 prior to its attack and many ships had then left the harbour, the March strike achieved its aim of clearing enemy naval and air units from the Palau area.²⁷

Koror town itself was also hit and planes skimmed over the big island of Babeldaob, strafing the shores, seeking out and demolishing enemy fortifications.²⁸ American aircraft dropped 600 tons of bombs in less than 48 hours.²⁹ The damage to Task Force 58 was minimal. Twenty planes were lost, but many of the crews were rescued. The ships were not touched.³⁰ The carriers withdrew from their position off Palau on 31 March to participate in further strikes in the Western Carolines area and then, on 2 April, covered by a cloudy sky, they returned to their launching point at Majuro Lagoon, "as peacefully as a tourist cruise".³¹

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For the people of the Palau Islands peace was gone. The "first war" had come. It made no difference to Islanders that the raid was only a covering strategy for operations involving other islands and other people. The devastating impact of the first experience of such violence was not lessened. Some Palauans, mainly those working

²⁶See *Ibid.*, & Morison, *Vol VIII...*, p. 32, & Craven and Cate, *Volume Four...*, pp. 603-604.

²⁷Smith, *Approach to the Philippines...*, p. 49.

²⁸Peattie, p. 279.

²⁹Robert Sherrod, *History of Marine Corps Aviation in World War II*. (Combat Forces Press, Washington DC, 1952) p. 255.

³⁰Smith, *Approach to the Philippines...*, p. 49, & Morison, *Vol VIII...*, p. 33.

³¹Morison, *Vol. VIII ...*, pp. 33-34.

for the Japanese, were aware that there was a war going on between Japan and America, but few understood what that meant or could anticipate the ways in which it could affect Palau.³² Others had only heard a rumour circulating - that a war was approaching.³³ This was given some substance as they watched the soldiers pour into Palau and the Japanese build up their defences, position anti-aircraft guns and dig out underground shelters. Yet for most Palauans, even those with some limited knowledge of the circumstances of the war, the reality manifest in the March raid was a shock.

How much a person knew about the war influenced how he or she reacted to the first bombing raid. Wakako Higuchi states that as early as 1940, the Japanese in Micronesia "sponsored...daily activities for the purpose of raising the nationalistic consciousness of both the Japanese and the Islanders".³⁴ These included days of worship, patriotic marches, restraint and frugality, and defence training. Fire fighting groups and other voluntary organizations sprang up amongst Islanders and Japanese, and Palauans contributed their savings in support of the war effort. With these developments, Higuchi states, "Palauan knowledge of the national situation deepened" and they "came to understand the war situation".³⁵ My interviews with Palauans suggest that this understanding was limited. During this period, those Palauans who had close contact with the Japanese and took part in these kinds of activities developed a raised consciousness about being a part of the Japanese world and of the "war effort". Yet did they really know what the "war effort" meant? With no history of modern industrial warfare on which to draw, the concept of "war" itself held limited meaning for Palauans before March 1944.³⁶ Almost all had heard rumours about war

³²For example see Jonathon Emul (M 1927) : KRW Interview 29 October 1990, Koror, Palau and Yano Kebekol Mariur (M 1926) : KRW Interview 21 November 1990, Koror, Palau and others.

³³For example see Benged Sechewas and others.

³⁴Higuchi, "War in Palau..." in White (ed.), p. 146.

³⁵Ibid. pp. 147 & 148.

³⁶Except in its traditional sense of localized conflict and formal competition between the northern and southern confederations, allied districts, villages or clans. This type of warfare consisted of small scale and continuing skirmishes. The level of technology was low. This type of warfare was prohibited and ended during the German administration. See Force, pp. 32-36, 55-56 & 80.

in varying forms, but none at this time, could know the actuality. Some did learn a little about the national situation through their contact with Japanese, but for others the national days were just a blur of Japanese ceremony.³⁷

"The word that was going around" was all that some Palauans knew about the war in which Japan was involved.³⁸ Benged Sechewas had no idea why the war had started. She had heard a rumour about "war", but did not know what that meant for her or for Palau. When the planes came, she had no way of working out what land they were from or why there was shooting.³⁹ Similarly Skesuk Skang, who was living in Ollei, a province of Ngarchelong, "did not know what war was and what was going on." However she noticed that the Japanese were building a big structure nearby. It had an antenna and a red light on the top.⁴⁰ Japanese activity suggested to her that something important was about to happen.⁴¹ Even further north, on the island of Kayangel, 18 year old Mongami Kelmal heard that war would break out very soon, but did not know what the fighting was about or why it concerned Palau. Before the March raid the Japanese took him from his home to work as a labourer in Airai, where they were constructing the new airstrip. The Japanese seemed to be preparing for something, but he learned little more about it until the March bombing.⁴² In Ngaraard, Saruang Bekemekmad did not hear much about the war from the Japanese, but she underwent some minimal training.

They [the Japanese] taught us how to put out fires with water and sand...and also that when war comes you are going to have to run inside the jungle and hide yourselves, but they didn't tell us anything else until March when it [the war] started.⁴³

³⁷See KRW Interviews with Palauans, October - November 1990.

³⁸See for example Benged Sechewas and Tivedakl Olblai (W 1917) : KRW Interview 29-30 October 1990, SCC, Koror, Palau.

³⁹Binged Sechewas.

⁴⁰A radio tower.

⁴¹Skesuk Skang (W 1914) : KRW Interview 25 October 1990, SCC, Koror, Palau.

⁴²Mongami Kelmal (M 1926) : KRW Interview 23 October 1990, SCC, Koror, Palau.

⁴³Saruang Bekemekmad (W 1915).

Gradually people who had only heard rumours about the approaching conflict, and had watched or listened to descriptions of the increasing ceremonies and marches, started to put small pieces of the puzzle together. Some were able to observe the Japanese preparing themselves for war, or become involved in related tasks assigned to them by the Japanese. A limited realization of the reasons behind these activities, combined with shreds of information picked up from relatives who worked for the Japanese, or from the soldiers or civilians living nearby, led some Palauans to form an understanding that a "war" had begun elsewhere and would soon come to Palau.

Contact with the Japanese was the decisive factor in how much each individual knew about the war prior to March 1944. In 1940 the Japanese population of Palau was 23, 767 to just over 5, 700 Islanders.⁴⁴ The number of Japanese swelled in the early years of the Pacific War as troops flowed into Palau and the rest of Micronesia.⁴⁵ However, other than some small agricultural settlements on Babeldaob⁴⁶, the majority of the Japanese population was in the district centre of Koror, which was also the headquarters of the *Nan'yo-cho* or South Seas Government in Micronesia.⁴⁷ It was compulsory for all Palauans to attend *kogakko*, or school for Islanders to learn the Japanese language, but, after those three years⁴⁸, many returned to a life where there was mostly superficial contact with Japanese. Japanese attitudes to Micronesians in general, "seem to have ranged between amicable tolerance and insensitivity and indifference".⁴⁹ *Tomin* (Islanders) were considered to be "third class people" and *kanakas*, which included people of the Carolines, such as Palauans, were held in even lower esteem.⁵⁰ Japanese generally avoided intimate association with them. Only

⁴⁴School of Naval Administration, pp. 65 & 52.

⁴⁵Peattie, pp. 248 & 252-253 & 176.

⁴⁶Ibid. pp. 170-174.

⁴⁷Ibid. pp. 174-175.

⁴⁸Three years was the norm. Exceptional students were chosen to attend school for a further two years. See School of Naval Administration, p. 217.

⁴⁹Peattie, p. 217.

⁵⁰Ibid. p. 112. *Kanakas* included Carolinians, Marshallese and Yapese as opposed to the slightly more highly regarded Chamorros of the Marianas.

those Palauans who lived in or near Koror town, which was known as "little Tokyo",⁵¹ or who were selected to work for the Japanese, had constant and closer contact with them.⁵² Mark Peattie, historian of the Japanese administration in Micronesia, states that on "most high islands" like Palau

there was an elite group of Islanders (not in the sense of the traditional culture, but in a modern economic sense) who prospered economically, held positions in the Japanese administration, or were married to Japanese, and who identified themselves and their future with Japan.⁵³

Many Palauans held jobs under Japanese administration, but employment beyond basic unskilled labouring positions was rare. Men who worked for the Japanese, either in departments of the *Nan'yo-cho* and the *Palau Shicho* (Palau District Branch Government), or for Japanese commercial companies and businesses, had more opportunity to hear of Japan's involvements outside Palau. Working with Japanese, mainly in Koror, they saw preparations for wartime conditions - the arrival of ships with food supplies and ammunition, military vehicles and soldiers.

In 1984-5, Higuchi interviewed a number of Palauans who worked closely with the Japanese military during the wartime period.⁵⁴ The majority of her informants were men in their late teens and early to mid-twenties in 1944. Most of these men, even if they did not know anything specific about the war, became involved in defence preparation and training as well as other tasks connected with the Japanese military. These roles allowed them to experience the sense of urgency brought about by the anticipation of conflict.

⁵¹Trumbull, p. 134. Few Palauans lived in Koror. The Japanese population of the town increased from 1700 in 1930 to over 300 in 1935 and burgeoned again during a boom in the pearl industry after 1937 and with the influx of troops from 1941. For a good brief description of the "vigorously expanding colonial city" of Koror see Peattie, pp. 174-76 and Donald Shuster, "State Shinto in Micronesia during Japanese Rule, 1914-1945", *Pacific Studies*, Volume 5, Number 2, 1982, p. 27.

⁵²For a detailed picture of Palau and the rest of Micronesia under Japanese administration see works by Peattie, Yanaihara, Clyde and Shuster, *Major Patterns of Social Change...*, and Ballendorf, Shuster & Higuchi.

⁵³Peattie, p. 218.

⁵⁴Wakako Higuchi, *Micronesians and the Pacific War: Interviews with Palauans*.

Young men such as these, employed as teaboys or messengers in the offices connected with the *Nan'yo-cho*, learned most about what was happening. Their jobs were among the higher positions available to Palauans during the Japanese administration. Termeteet Eusevio was a messenger with the Palau Telegram Station, working alongside about twenty Japanese. He heard about the fighting in Manchuria and often received news about the number of warships entering Malakal Harbour. Later he was transferred to work for the military because "it was more important". Moving to Malakal, he became an overseer of Palauan labourers loading and unloading supplies.⁵⁵ Jonathon Emul worked as a teaboy, serving Japanese officials in the South Seas Bureau. While there, he learned that war had broken out, and when the soldiers moved into Palau he was sent to labour for the military. He underwent some training in putting out fires and locating enemy aircraft from outlooks on the tops of buildings in Koror. He was also a member of the *seinendan* or Palauan Young Men's Association and this group did much to assist the Japanese in making preparations for war.⁵⁶ On learning about the war, another man, who worked as an office boy in the High Court, expressed his desire to go to New Guinea to help the war effort in whatever way he could.⁵⁷

Yano Kebekol Mariur was employed by the Japanese government before the war, initially as a copra inspector. Later he transferred to an office and became the secretary for The Palau Agricultural Produce Union, an organization which supervised the planting of crops and aimed to develop a produce market for the people of Palau.⁵⁸ During that time, he learned that Japan was at war with America. He heard about the fighting in Manchuria and the bombing of Pearl Harbor, and watched the Japanese

⁵⁵Termeteet Eusevio (M 1916) : WH Interview 2 April 1985 in Ibid.

⁵⁶Jonathon Emul. The Palauan Young Men's Association was a youth group formed during the Japanese period. These groups (for men and for women) developed from a combination of classes in Japanese language established by the Japanese Navy and existing traditional clubs. The *seinendan* was run by Japanese and became a training ground for young people in Japanese ways, especially loyalty to the colonial government and the Emperor. See Peattie, p. 108

⁵⁷Andres Demei (M 1924) : WH Interview 22 April 1985 in Higuchi, *Micronesians and the Pacific War: Interviews...*

⁵⁸The *Palau Seisan Kumiai* (The Palau Agricultural Produce Union). See Yano K. Mariur (M 1926) : WH Interview 11 April 1985 in Higuchi, *Micronesians and the Pacific War: Interviews...*

soldiers flocking into Palau. Like Jonathon Emul he was a member of the Young Men's Association. Through this club he was trained to act as a night watchman, looking out for enemy planes. Once a week he joined other men for fitness training, running about two miles from the centre of town to Ngermid.⁵⁹

The highest position available to Palauan men under Japanese administration was *junkei* or native policeman. Men selected for such an important role had close contact with Japanese and therefore much greater access to information about Japan's relationship with the rest of the world than other Palauans. Joseph Tellei, a *junkei* in 1935, even heard about Japan's withdrawal from the League of Nations in that year. That, combined with the laying out of searchlights from Koror to Ngeremenglui made him afraid that the "war" the Japanese had been talking about would soon begin in Palau.⁶⁰

The majority of companies and industries present in Palau just prior to the war were part of the government-backed *Nan'yo Kohatsu, KK* (South Seas Development Company)⁶¹, or operated under the aegis of the *Nan'yo Takushoku, KK* (South Seas Colonization Corporation).⁶² This corporation had close ties with the government in that *Nan'yo-cho* personnel dominated its board of directors and held the major interest in the company.⁶³ Therefore Palauans who worked for Japanese companies on the island were almost as close to the Japanese administration as those employed by the government. Baiei Babul was a cashier at a Japanese warehouse store and heard a lot of discussion about the approaching conflict. Later, he was transferred to Malakal to help dig shelters. The military warned Baiei and his fellow workers that they should soon move into caves for protection. Prior to the March raid they were sent by their employer to refuges in the Rock Islands.⁶⁴

⁵⁹Yano Kebekol Mariur (M 1926).

⁶⁰Joseph Tellei (M 1902) : WH Interview 27 March 1985 in Higuchi, *Micronesians and the Pacific War: Interviews...*

⁶¹Also known as *Nanko*.

⁶²Also known as *Nantaku*.

⁶³Peattie, pp. 127-132 & 133-134.

⁶⁴Baiei Babul (M 1921) : KRW Interview 1 November 1990, SCC, Koror, Palau.

Rose Kebekol had lived in Arakabesang where her husband was employed by the large Japanese company, *Suisan*, growing pearls. She also worked, as a cashier and general cleaner in a store. Rose's husband heard about the war from his company. "They informed him that the war was now at New Guinea but it is on its way over here",⁶⁵ so before the March raid, Rose moved from Arakabesang to Aimeliik with her parents and her two children. When the war began, they were able to find shelter in a cave.

Itelbang Luii was also employed by the *Nanko Suisan* Company, distributing rations to Japanese residents of Koror. As an employee of the company he learned that a war had broken out between Japan and the United States, because at the time of the Pearl Harbor attack, there were special announcements over the public address system and additional newspapers were issued to the Japanese workers. He participated in physical training and was then ordered to go to work at Malakal Harbour, transporting ammunition by truck from there to Airai. On 29 March he learned from a lieutenant about the possibility of an air raid and watched as a number of ships left Malakal. The following day the US planes attacked.⁶⁶

People who were not in continuous or close contact with Japanese generally knew less about the preparations for conflict. Like Mongami Kelmal from Kayangel, some were conscripted to work on various construction projects, sometimes a long way from their homes. As early as 1939, as they began to build up bases in the Western Pacific, the Japanese conscripted Micronesians to carry out construction work. On many of the larger islands where the Japanese had long been in residence, it was more often a matter of persuading Islanders to volunteer their labour rather than physically forcing them.⁶⁷ However, some of the men who laboured for the soldiers did not understand why they had been employed or why they were encouraged to work

⁶⁵Rose Kebekol (W 1922) : KRW Interview 19 November 1990, SCC, Koror, Palau.

⁶⁶Itelbang Luii (M 1923) : WH Interview 28 March 1985 in Higuchi, *Micronesians and the Pacific War: Interviews...*

⁶⁷Peattie, p. 251.

so hard. A 25 year old man from Ngermid, who was working at Airai airport on 30 March, had been taken to labour there by the Japanese. "They didn't ask or anything. We had to go over there to hurry the construction at that time". He knew little about the war. He could not comprehend why the work was so urgent and only learned who was dropping bombs after the attack.⁶⁸

In Palau, while some Islanders clearly had no choice as to whether they would or would not labour for the Japanese, others willingly lent their assistance in preparing shelters, working on construction projects and unloading ships. Many of these were already working for the Japanese in other programmes before the war; they were simply transferred to work on military projects.

Before March 1944, Mereb Eruang joined a group of Palauans fishing for the Japanese,

But in March the Japanese probably had a feeling that the war was going to start so they ended the fishing and started putting us into separate groups. Some went to Babeldaob, but I stayed in Koror as a watchman.⁶⁹

Part of his job was to help the soldiers load and unload supplies from the ships, but it was as a watchman that he was one of the first to hear on 30 March that enemy planes were nearing Palau.⁷⁰

Karmelong Mengur worked for the military as a truck driver. He understood that he was helping the Japanese to strengthen their fortifications in Palau. He remembers the Japanese were very strict at the time.

I had to work and there was very little time for leisure time....You could not miss thirty seconds of work. We could not be late. We could not even drive smoking cigarettes at the same time...There are no holidays. You work all the time.⁷¹

⁶⁸Man, Ngermid.

⁶⁹Mereb Eruang.

⁷⁰Ibid.

⁷¹Karmelong Rechululk Mengur (M 1918) : KRW Interview 27 October 1990, Koror, Palau.

He did not know much about the conflict between Japan and the West, but, because he was a trained driver, he was one of the first men to be selected to serve with the Japanese in New Guinea. On the day of selection, a large number of workers were brought together and given a physical examination and tests to gauge their ability to work. After this, some were chosen to serve with the Japanese overseas. Karmelong understood, from what the Japanese were saying, that they were "going to demolish the Americans [because] they were visitors...we had to push them out".⁷²

Palauans still attending school, too young to labour full-time, participated in some training sessions as part of their school exercises. They also made preparations in case of an air raid and had shelters ready to use. At the Vocational School in Koror, students helped dig a tunnel that could be used if necessary. When the raid began most knew what to do. Pupils were assigned to prepare food and bring it to the shelter, which was within easy reach of the school building. However, the students only knew what their instructors told them about why these preparations were necessary. Wilhelm Rengiil was a fourteen year old student at the Vocational School before the war began. He was trained in a very "military and coercive" manner at the school and therefore learned not to doubt or anything he was told. There was no way to question information. Orders had to be followed.

We were meant to obey and when you are young and learn that when somebody comes and shows you white and says "This is black" and you say "No, it's white. [They say] "Come say black" and so you have to follow and say its black [even if] it is white...So we went through that kind of training.⁷³

During the first attack, a number of the warships anchored near Koror were sunk. Many of the troops on board were brought ashore and housed for a time at the Vocational School. Wilhelm recalls there were probably "five hundred" of them and the students were "packed like sardines because soldiers took over most of our classrooms". The war became a reality very quickly. The students were forced to be a

⁷²Ibid. Palauans served with the Japanese in labouring and construction roles. See Appendix A for brief summary of Palauan recruitment and war service overseas.

⁷³Wilhelm Rengiil.

part of it because they were immediately assigned to work for the soldiers, carrying rations.⁷⁴

Children at the *kogakko* took part in training exercises to prepare for wartime conditions. These mainly consisted of fire prevention drills. The students would set something alight and then attempt to put out the fire using buckets of water or sand.⁷⁵ Father Felix Yaoch recalls the students were also shown how they must run to the nearest shelter when there was any danger. Holes were dug under houses in preparation for an air attack.⁷⁶

Minoru Ueki, whose father was Japanese, had more access to information as a student at the *shogakko*, the school for Japanese children. There the students were assembled in a field and the principal announced to them that Japan had declared war and attacked Pearl Harbor. After that day, school activities became more militarized. Great emphasis was placed on loyalty towards the mother country and obedience to commands. Students participated in fire drills and were taught to retreat into trench-like shelters in the event of air raids. Later Minoru and his classmates were sent to Airai where "we were contributing our service to building of [the] airfield. We were there at the airfield when the first raid came".⁷⁷ He knew that he had to work hard in order to support the Japanese war effort.

Palauan women generally did not hold positions in government departments. Some, like Rose Kebekol, worked for companies, and therefore had contact with Japanese. Mengesebuuch Yalap was employed by a Japanese newspaper as a type-setter, so she had access to some information about the bombing of Pearl Harbor and the beginning of war with the United States. However, she recalls the Japanese only allowed Palauans to read one of the Japanese styles of writing, "the simpler one" and

⁷⁴Ibid.

⁷⁵Yoshiteru Sugino (M 1933) : WH Interview 3 May 1985 in Higuchi, *Micronesians and the Pacific War: Interviews...*

⁷⁶Father Felix Yaoch.

⁷⁷Minoru Ueki.

what was written in this system was less detailed than what was produced for Japanese consumption.⁷⁸

The majority of women did not work in such jobs. Some worked as housemaids for Japanese families. Many were young female students who had to do housework and run errands after school for Japanese households in Koror town. They worked for two hours each day and for a half day on Saturdays as part of their Japanese language training.⁷⁹ These, and others, who did not work for the Japanese at all, were generally only aware of "the word", the rumour about the approaching conflict that was circulating. Women who were not employed heard very little, unless they were near one of the Japanese agricultural communities. Augusta Ramarui, who was living in Ngchesar, learned about the war situation from the Japanese civilians who lived nearby.⁸⁰ Others gathered more details from their husbands or family members who did work for the Japanese.

Palauans who worked for the Japanese became part of the process of war preparation. With some foreknowledge of the coming raids they were able to leave vulnerable locations with their families and take shelter in prepared hide-outs or in refuges in the Rock Islands. Others became directly involved in some form of defence role such as watchmen, fire-fighters, construction workers or stevedores.

On the morning of 30 March, Mereb Eruang was stationed near the hospital. He was able to see the planes bombing "right across the hills" from where he was.

We could see the Japanese go up to the hills and look to the spot where the planes were coming in and from here we could see the soldiers climbing up trees and then they would get shot and they would fall down.⁸¹

⁷⁸Mengesebuuch Yalap. The "simpler one" is *katakana*. See Higuchi, "Micronesians and the Pacific War: The Palauans" in Ballendorf, Shuster & Higuchi, p. 95.

⁷⁹Kalistus Polloi : Donald R. Shuster Interview 5 December 1980 in Shuster, "Aspects of Japan's Cultural Impact on Palau" in Ballendorf, Shuster & Higuchi, p. 57.

⁸⁰Augusta Ramarui (W 1923) : KRW Interview 17 October 1990, SCC, Koror, Palau.

⁸¹Mereb Eruang.

At first he did not know what was going on, never having experienced anything like an air raid before, but his training made him stay where he was and watch. He gradually saw that the main targets of the American planes were the places where the Japanese had their guns and fortifications. He watched the oil tanks at Malakal explode and burst into roaring flames.⁸²

Minoru Ueki, labouring at Airai airfield, despite his shock at seeing a friend die, instinctively acted the way he had been taught and rushed to join his assigned group. He knew it was important to move away from the airstrip because that was the target. He and his classmates ran first to the stream and then up towards Airai where they took shelter underneath the *Abai* (Meeting House), until darkness fell. They could then move again in relative safety.⁸³ Similarly Wilhelm Rengiil and his fellow students, once they understood they were in an air raid, knew they should hide in the dugout shelter next to the school. When they realized they were reasonably safe, excitement and curiosity replaced fear. The only negative feeling Wilhelm had at that time was discomfort at being cramped in amongst the Japanese soldiers.⁸⁴

In contrast, Palauans who had only heard rumours about "a war", knew next to nothing about what to expect or what to do when it came. During the March raid, Dirreou Orrukei did not know what a bullet was or that it could kill.⁸⁵ Ascension Ngelmas, although she had heard from a messenger a few days earlier that war was expected soon, did not do anything until the planes attacked, because she had no idea of what to do.⁸⁶ Dirreou, Ascension and other Palauans in similar circumstances, had no training to draw upon. Like most people involved in the March raid, their first reaction was panic. As they had not been warned about what they should do, their subsequent actions were also based on fear and the human instinct for survival. They

⁸²Ibid.

⁸³Dr. Minoru Ueki.

⁸⁴Wilhelm Rengiil.

⁸⁵Dirreou Orrukei.

⁸⁶Ascension Ngelmas.

ran to hide from the planes to whatever form of shelter was closest and seemed relatively safe - a tree, a stream, a cave - any place where they could protect themselves and wait to see what happened.

Having never experienced modern warfare, Palauans had no frame of reference from which to gather intelligence about what was likely to happen. Rose Adelbai recalls that in March,

We knew it was a war, but we didn't know what was going on, because it had never happened to us. We didn't know that any killings were going to happen....When the planes came....to Airai airport where the Palauan men were working at the time....they were all turning to look and...greeting them because they thought they were Japanese and then they started shooting and bombing and most people got hurt.⁸⁷

Palauans relied entirely on what they were told or not told. From childhood, Islanders were trained to regard Japanese as superior and beyond question.⁸⁸ They "had no choice but to believe them".⁸⁹ There was no reason to doubt the Japanese anyway, and most people had no understanding that they might need to know more. On 30 March most Palauans expected to see Japanese planes, not American, and therefore reacted accordingly.

Other factors, such as the age and gender of each person and the place she or he was at the time of the raid, also influenced people's reactions to the March bombing. While the drama was exciting to many younger people, older Islanders, who had more responsibility for others - children, husbands, wives and family - regarded the crisis in a different light. Memories of the "first war" reflect these different concerns.

Wilhelm Rengiil realizes now that during the war he and the other students

were at the stage we call adolescent - we were at that development stage of life and we were excited. Sometimes we were afraid, but we would really like to see what's going on so when the machine gun from the plane shoots, you would see fire coming out and it would really be exciting.⁹⁰

⁸⁷Rose Adelbai.

⁸⁸Peattie, p. 218.

⁸⁹Augusta Ramarui.

⁹⁰Wilhelm Rengiil.

Similarly, for Felix Yaoch the beginning of the war was frightening, but was also a "youth adventure". He watched the bombing raid from the safety of a little valley behind his house:

We were watching all the action, watching the smoke, black smoke going up with the bombers coming and they'd disappear in the smoke and then [it would] die down and they come up out of the smoke again and explosions followed...my older brother disappeared so we were looking for him and we found him helping the soldiers who were with the cannons.⁹¹

As a young boy at this very beginning of war, Felix, although afraid, was "enjoying all that was going on" It was different for older people, and he knew that his "parents were suffering anxieties". During the first day Felix and his family stayed in the shelter behind their house, but the following day they decided to move to an island off Airai where they knew there was a cave. Felix recalls when they reached the island there were many signs of Japanese casualties.

There was a boat that had run aground right there and soldiers were taken into the caves. Those who died were buried and those who survived eventually moved on and left some of their blood-stained blankets. They seem to have been pilots because there was so many of the pilots' uniforms left behind with the blankets.⁹²

For Kiari Yaoch, Felix's mother, memories of that time are not of the things she witnessed, but are connected to the trouble she had trying to care for and protect her husband, who was very ill. Kiari knew they had to move away from Koror, but he did not want to leave their home. Still they managed to get to Airai and were resting by a big tree, when some Japanese soldiers came along and ordered them to move. "They told us 'Go find some other place to be because you are in the way over here'".⁹³ Luckily she was able to find a Palauan man with a boat and he moved them over to a Rock Island, where she remembers seeing a boat that had exploded, and the bodies of Japanese dead. Her husband was very quiet.

⁹¹Father Felix Yaoch.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³Kiari Yaoch (W 1910).

By the time they were settled dawn was breaking and just as she started to prepare breakfast, the planes came over shooting and they had to move again. Not long after the bombing raid ended they began the trip towards Airai, her husband's "original place". When they reached their destination, a Rock Island near Airai, he became very ill. Each day he tried to eat a little rice, but Kiari knew he was weakening. He quietly told her he wished to be back home in Ngerbeched, where she could cook him some taro or tapioca and he could use the heated water to soothe his painful feet. Kiari saw this as "a sign that he didn't have much time left". She decided it was time to move him to the mainland, to Airai. One week later he died.⁹⁴

For those people at Airai or Malakal and in Koror, the main targets of the American planes, the bombing was life threatening. Many, like the Yaoch family, left the area for the relative safety of the Rock Islands, while others took shelter wherever they could. Those at Airai airfield scattered into the jungle in all directions. In contrast, people like Mengesebuuch Yalap, who were already further afield, could watch the drama unfold from a distance. She was afraid, and still in some danger from the planes that swept over Babeldaob, but she was away from the centre of the attack and therefore less vulnerable. She waited for the planes to leave huddled amongst the bushes "like a mouse trying to hide myself".⁹⁵

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The "first war" ended after those two days in March, but the planes returned and bombing began again in June. In the lull between the raids, there was a lot of movement. Many people were confused about what to do after the bombing and acted on instinct. Some who had escaped into the jungle in March, felt they should return home to see what had happened to close relatives and to their homes and belongings. Others remained where they were or moved further into the jungle, up into Babeldaob,

⁹⁴Ibid.

⁹⁵Mengesebuuch Yalap.

seeking better refuges. Having experienced one "war" they now knew that the most important thing to do was to find a safe place to take shelter. Some felt they should wait until they were told what to do by the Japanese.

One woman, who lived in Ngermid and fled to a cave in Airai during the March bombing, stayed there for nearly two months. Once it was clear the danger was passed, the men of the family made their way back to Ngermid to collect some belongings and see what had happened to their homes. They were shocked to find that the floor had been ripped up from their rooms, all their possessions had vanished and the Japanese had stabled horses in a number of the houses.⁹⁶ Similarly, Anthony Polloi and his parents returned to their home in Airai only a day after the bombing and found that in the family's brief absence Japanese soldiers had moved into the house. There was nothing they could do about it.⁹⁷

Direou Orrukei was in Koror during the March raid. She remembers that during and after that attack many people from Koror went to Ngarabotal in Aimeliik, which became like a second Koror.⁹⁸ She herself made her way to Melekeok.⁹⁹ Benged Sechewas, who was in Airai, was told by the Japanese to move out of the way into the Rock Islands or further into Babeldaob. She and her family began to move towards Ngardmau, but on the way they visited relatives in Aimeliik and decided to stay there.¹⁰⁰ Other Islanders moved about from place to place until the bombing began again and they were forced to find a place to take shelter.¹⁰¹ Some people who were already in safe refuges in the Rock Islands, or in caves or shelters on Babeldaob, remained where they were. One Ngermid man, who fled into the mangroves during the March bombing, stayed there for a long time as he was afraid and confused.

⁹⁶Woman, Ngermid (1922) : KRW Interview 23 October 1990, Koror, Palau.

⁹⁷Dr. Anthony Polloi.

⁹⁸It was called "Dai 2 Koror" in Japanese meaning "second Koror", or "Dai ni Koror" - "another Koror". See Andres Demei and Tadashi Ichikawa (M 1925) : WH Interview 15 December 1985 in Higuchi, *Micronesians and the Pacific War: Interviews...*

⁹⁹Direou Orrukei.

¹⁰⁰Benged Sechewas.

¹⁰¹Mengesebuuch Yalap.

I didn't know where anybody was. At the time when we all scattered into the jungle...we were so scared that we didn't know what to do. We would pick up a stone or something as if it was our purse. We were just so scared.¹⁰²

He remained where he was and later began to do some work, weaving baskets from coconut leaves to give to the Japanese. Ascension Ngelmas did not return to Koror either, but stayed in Airai, with her relatives.¹⁰³

Some Islanders who had been working in Koror or attending school there before the March raid returned to the town. Both Minoru Ueki and Wilhelm Rengiil recommenced their schooling. Minoru, after hiding out in Airai during the first raid, gradually made his way back to Koror to find his parents, only to learn that they had left for Aimeliik to stay with his mother's family. Again he had to cross the channel from Koror to the big island,

and in those days there was no bridge, you had to go by boat. And there was a stream of people going back and forth...Lots of injuries...I sat there and waited for my turn to get on the boat and then walk back to Aimeliik where I met my parents again.¹⁰⁴

He was able to stay there for a short time before he was recalled to school in Koror. Wilhelm Rengiil remained in Koror at school, but his role as a student altered. Working for the army, taking rations from one unit to another, became an essential element of his training.¹⁰⁵ Both he and Minoru were therefore still in Koror when the next phase of bombing began.

Mereb Eruang, the watchman, also remained in Koror working for the soldiers. However after air assaults in June and a carrier strike in late July, Koror became almost uninhabitable, a dangerous wasteland of smoke and rubble, with only a few stark buildings left standing. The soldiers then ordered all the remaining Palauans to move to Aimeliik or other parts of the big island.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰²Man, Ngermid.

¹⁰³Ascension Ngelmas.

¹⁰⁴Dr. Minoru Ueki.

¹⁰⁵Wilhelm Rengiil.

¹⁰⁶Mereb Eruang.

In June 1944 Palau was once more attacked from the air, again in support of an operation elsewhere. D-Day for the assault on the Mariana Islands was 15 June, so early that month neutralization strikes were begun against surrounding islands. On 3 June Palau was bombed and on the 9th Army Air Force planes struck the airfield on Peleliu.¹⁰⁷ During the following weeks, bombers made further assaults against Japanese installations, to ensure that any replacement aircraft and repaired airfields and fortifications could not be used in defence of the Marianas.¹⁰⁸ In July, surveillance and attacks against Palau increased. During that month Fifth Air Force bombers made nightly armed reconnaissance sweeps over the islands.¹⁰⁹ On 23 July, Task Force 58 left the Marianas area and from the 25th to the 28th its carrier-based planes bombed and strafed the airfields at Airai and on Peleliu and Angaur, destroying 47 Japanese planes parked on the strips. They also ranged over Koror and the surrounding waters, seeking out enemy ships.¹¹⁰

By August the focus of the raids began to change. They were no longer support missions for other operations, but were now directed at "softening up" the Palaus for a projected invasion in September.¹¹¹ Photographic intelligence showed that despite the July bombing strikes the Japanese still had 36 undamaged aircraft sitting on the airstrip at Peleliu and others on Arakabesang island. The strips on Peleliu and Babeldaob were in good condition and ready for use. In Koror the Headquarters of the South Seas Bureau, (also the headquarters of the Japanese military) "appeared battered but impressive".¹¹² The warehouses and supply buildings on Malakal had been damaged, but were still serviceable. Fortifications and anti-aircraft guns were abundant. During

¹⁰⁷Morison, *Vol. VIII...*, p. 174.

¹⁰⁸See Craven & Cate, *Volume Four...*, p. 638, Peattie, p. 279, & Sherrod, p. 255.

¹⁰⁹63rd Bombardment Squadron. See Craven & Cate, *Volume Four...*, p. 667.

¹¹⁰Morison, *Vol. VIII ...*, p. 367

¹¹¹Wesley Frank Craven and James Lea Cate, *The Army Air Forces in World War II Volume Five, The Pacific : Matterhorn to Nagasaki, June 1944 to August 1945*. (New Imprint by the Office of Air Force History, Washington DC, 1983) p. 298.

¹¹²*Ibid.* p. 299.

August these targets were attacked repeatedly. For three weeks beginning on 8 August the 868th Bombardment Squadron flew from Los Negros, an island in the Admiralties, and bombed the Palaus at night, destroying buildings and defences on Koror and Malakal. On 23 August, photographs showed most of the enemy's aircraft had been demolished, but Malakal Harbour was still filled with ships. Bomber Command assigned the 307th Group to cover Japanese shipping, while the 5th pounded the town of Koror in raids beginning 25 August. The "excellent pattern" of 100-pound bombs dropped on the town reduced most of the buildings to smoking rubble.¹¹³ Over the next twelve days, 300 B-24 bombers continued to attack the island. What was not destroyed in August collapsed when daylight raids continued into September. The 307th and 5th Bomber Groups swept over the Palaus every day and, escaping most of the heavy defensive fire, demolished 507 buildings in Koror with nearly 800 tons of bombs. The airstrips at Airai and Peleliu were so pitted and torn up by constant shelling that they would be useless without major restoration.¹¹⁴ There was no peace even at night as the 868th Bombardment Squadron moved from Los Negros to Noemfoor, from which it renewed its nightly raids against Palau throughout early September. During September B-24s thundered over the islands at night dropping close to 92 tons of bombs, including incendiaries.¹¹⁵

Near the beginning of September, four carrier groups from Task Force 38 arrived off Palau and began more widespread strikes. For a week the carrier-based fighters ranged over and strafed the island area in nearly 1500 missions, while the Task Force ships fired 6,314 rounds of shells into the island.¹¹⁶

These raids preceded the seizure of Peleliu and Angaur during September and October. After the securing of the southern islands in October, air strikes continued until the end of the war and the surrender of the Japanese in August 1945. During this

¹¹³Ibid.

¹¹⁴Ibid. pp. 299-300. These groups made 11 missions and a total of 394 sorties over Palau dropping 793.6 tons of bombs. Also see The 81st Wildcat Division Historical Committee, p. 63.

¹¹⁵Craven & Cate, *Volume Five...*, p. 299.

¹¹⁶Ibid. p. 306, & The 81st Wildcat Division Historical Committee, p. 64.

period constant regular Allied raids, or "milk runs" as the Americans called them, were made from Peleliu and Angaur over the bypassed islands of Palau, including day and night attacks on Babeldaob and Koror.¹¹⁷

The bomber pilots who conducted these raids felt a sense of unreality looking down through the window of the cockpit. They concentrated on the efficiency of their work and the safety of their crews and planes, rather than on the destruction below.¹¹⁸ Charles A. Lindbergh, who flew a number of combat missions in the Pacific during World War Two, wrote of the task:

One is separated from the surface of that island as though he were viewing it on a motion picture screen in a theater on the other side of the world. A plane in the sky, an island in the water, there is no thread of realization, of understanding, of human feeling that connects the two.¹¹⁹

What then did the huge tonnage of bombs, dropped from the sky in "excellent pattern" over the Palau Islands, mean to the people living below the planes?

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Palauan recollections of this time hinge upon the type of bombing which they endured. Those in Koror were exposed to more regular and intense attacks from high level bombers, and therefore perceived this second experience of war as being even worse than the first. Minoru Ueki remembers that in the second attack,

it was the bombers, big bombers...and by that time...everybody was moving, soldiers were asking us to leave Koror...we were asked to move to Babeldaob, so we went to Aimeliik and stayed there.¹²⁰

¹¹⁷The effect of these continuous raids on Palau is discussed in Chapter Three.

¹¹⁸Michael S. Sherry, *The Rise of American Air Power: The Creation of Armageddon*. (Yale University Press 1987) p. 211.

¹¹⁹Charles A. Lindbergh, *The Wartime Journals of Charles A. Lindbergh* (New York 1970) p. 920 as quoted in *Ibid.* p. 210.

¹²⁰Dr. Minoru Ueki.

The planes came "at certain times, in formation and dropped bombs here and there. I guess they just saw the land and kept on dropping bombs".¹²¹ Jonathon Emul also recalls that the big bombers came to Koror at night,

I never forget...Koror was the main target and eleven o' clock was the prime time...and you think where are they going to drop the bomb? But we knew for sure around eleven o' clock...they drop their bombs on the main target, especially that place, but sometimes they miss the target and hit the civilian section.¹²²

Those on Babeldaob experienced more intermittent attacks. Anthony Polloi in Aimeliik felt that the "so-called second raid" seemed "less intensive" than the March raid.¹²³ His clearest recollection is not of bombers, but of the carrier strike of late July, which struck targets other than Koror. During this time he saw the fighter planes flying low overhead, so low that "we could see the fliers" inside. The most intriguing thing for this young boy was that the pilots were flying their planes wearing no shirts - "they just go naked!"¹²⁴

Palauans recall different aspects of this period of bombing, but most agree they were generally more prepared. Dengelei Saburo, a teenager during the war, remembers that in March,

we ran into the jungle, but we didn't have any instinct or knowledge about what to do if they drop bombs or shoot at us. We would just run and hide ourselves near big trees.¹²⁵

After that raid the Japanese ordered them to dig out shelters or find caves for refuge. It was "July when the war came again", and during this second phase of attacks, Dengelei and her family knew that they had to stay in the cave so "every time we would hear a plane coming we would run inside".¹²⁶

¹²¹Ibid.

¹²²Jonathon Emul.

¹²³Dr. Anthony Polloi.

¹²⁴Ibid.

¹²⁵Dengelei Saburo.

¹²⁶Ibid.

In that "seventh month...when everything started again" the Japanese told Rose Adelbai to move away from her home in Ngermid to Aimeliik. There in the jungle, her family dug a shelter in one of the hills, so that when the planes attacked they would have somewhere to hide.¹²⁷

Twelve year old Felix Yaoch attended school in Aimeliik after the March raid. The airfield at Airai was severely damaged by the bombing and Felix found the Japanese

required so much manpower to finish the airstrip [that] they recruited every able-bodied person, including students so we marched from there...to collect pebbles from the hillside and then went back...[we would] stockpile them and trucks would come and load them and spread them on the strip.¹²⁸

Japanese planes took off from the strip in the mornings and later some returned, others did not. The students were told by the Japanese that if an American plane attacked and an air raid began, they should drop to their knees and then lie down flat. The soldiers also explained what the students should do if they were "caught in an open field", stressing that the best defence in those circumstances was, "Don't make any move. Extend your arms as if you were the trunk of a tree!"¹²⁹

During this period, Ascension Ngelmas was in a village in Airai . When the planes came she jumped into the stream and hid beneath the water. She now knew what the bullets from the planes could do. She had seen a Japanese man hit in the stomach. The soldiers carried him to the porch of her house, but she told them that she could not have him there. They took him away to attend to his wounds, but later she watched him being buried not far from her home. Ascension was also present when a relative was shot in the head, leaving him permanently paralysed down his left side. These incidents left her "shocked" rather than afraid so she still ventured out into the open to collect food. Often she went across to one of the Rock Islands to gather taro.

¹²⁷Rose Adelbai.

¹²⁸Father Felix Yaoch.

¹²⁹Ibid.

I went to this Rock Island and when the planes started shooting and everything I was so brave that I wasn't even afraid of those big crocodiles. That's a place known for crocodiles. But for me, I got in the water and I swam across...[At first] we had a raft made of bamboo, but...it was easy for the planes to spot us on that, so we would get into the mangrove and we would wait until the planes left and then we would get into the water and swim back while carrying food.¹³⁰

In the period before the invasion of Peleliu, Ascension saw a "big American ship" arrive. From one of the Airai hills, she watched five or six Japanese vessels taking shelter amongst the Rock Islands.

The American ships were bigger so they stayed out in the deep sea. A couple of them...the planes would just come up from there. They would go up into the sky and shoot at the Japanese ships that were hiding in the Airai Rock Islands.¹³¹

Although she does not recall the exact month, it is clear that she was witnessing one of the American carrier strikes, either in July or September. Ascension remembers that even though the main target of the attack seemed to be the ships, a lot of Japanese people on the island were killed.

On the road to Airai there were dead bodies, one after another. Only one American had died, all of them were Japanese. A lot of bodies were floating in the mangroves and there was that one American man. He was very tall. I recognized him as an American because he was different from the rest.¹³²

Some other Palauans also gained their first, often distant, sight of Americans during this period, when they witnessed the shooting down of bombers from which the crews bailed out.¹³³ Temel Ngirchorachel was in his late teens during the war and he vividly recalls that after they had seen a bomber hit and the pilot parachute down, a Japanese officer had given foot long pieces of wood to some Palauan men and ordered them to accompany a group of soldiers to the crash site. He explained that "if the

¹³⁰Ascension Ngelmas.

¹³¹Ibid.

¹³²Ibid.

¹³³This was probably during the daily missions of the Fifth Airforce's B-24s in August and September of 1944. See Craven & Cate, *Volume Five*..., pp. 299-300.

Americans come" they should, "knock them on the head with the wood!" Temel saw the Japanese soldiers capture the pilot. He

felt sorry for him because of the way they treated him. They put a blindfold on his face and had him tortured and he was saying something...he might have been asking for a cigarette.¹³⁴

Temel saw the man imprisoned and later heard that the Japanese had killed him, although he did not know where or how. Investigations initiated after the war by Peleliu Island Commander General Rogers confirmed that the Japanese had taken at least one prisoner. An airman had seen a crew member bail out of a disabled B-24. The downed American had survived the drop and had been picked up by a Japanese boat. Evidence showed that he had later been executed.¹³⁵

Minoru Ueki also remembers seeing a number of planes shot down by anti-aircraft fire. Some of the Americans were rescued by their own side, but others were captured by the Japanese military police, who were "very, very fierce...very bad people".¹³⁶ While in Koror working with the military police, Jonathon Emul saw "several planes coming down".¹³⁷ One of his tasks in helping the soldiers was to watch for enemy planes from the tops of the remaining buildings in Koror and report their location. He recalls the Palauan watchmen were often of little use to the military because as soon as the bombs exploded they would "run away" and hide in fear. However, on one occasion, as Jonathon returned from taking his parents to the safety of the Rock Islands, he

saw the plane going down shooting some place here and then it was hit and "Boom" and I saw the man before his parachute opened. He came down with the plane and he was covered in flames.¹³⁸

¹³⁴Temel Ngirchorachel.

¹³⁵Benis M. Frank & Henry I. Shaw Jr., *Victory and Occupation : History of the US Marine Corps Operations in World War II, Volume V*. (Historical Branch, G-3 Division, Headquarters US Marine Corps, Washington DC, 1968) p. 453n.

¹³⁶Dr. Minoru Ueki.

¹³⁷Jonathon Emul recalls seeing one plane shot down near the island of Arakabesang.

¹³⁸Ibid.

A number of B-24's were shot down during the August-September raids. On 25 August, during a daylight sweep over Koror, a B-24 was attacked by Japanese aircraft and caught fire. The five crewmen who got out of the aircraft were machine-gunned by Japanese planes as they parachuted down. Early in September, three more bombers were shot down and one was so badly damaged it crashed on its way back to base. Only four of its crew members were rescued.¹³⁹

As the regularity and intensity of bombing increased in early September during the lead up to the invasion of Peleliu, most Palauans left Koror and other target areas because it was too dangerous. The Japanese encouraged people to move out of the way. The schools that had continued at Airai and Aimeliik were closed and students joined their families and moved further into the jungle. Some continued to work for the Japanese in their centres on Babeldaob. During this time the Japanese also forced most of the inhabitants of Peleliu and Angaur to leave their home islands and take refuge on Babeldaob.

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The people of the islands of Peleliu and Angaur also experienced the destruction of war for the first time during March 1944. Their foreknowledge of the war was influenced by the same factors as those in Koror and on Babeldaob. Some had only heard rumours. One teenage girl remembers there was "a word going around for us to prepare ourselves and get ready to go inside the caves".¹⁴⁰

Others working for the Japanese learned more. Fumio Rengiil worked for the government and was President of the Young Men's Association. The Japanese informed this group that they would have to increase the speed of construction work to protect the island from possible American invasion. Even before this Fumio had

¹³⁹Craven & Cate, *Volume Five...*, pp. 299-300.

¹⁴⁰Woman, Peleliu (1927) : KRW Interview 23 November 1990, Koror, Palau.

learned from a Japanese newspaper about the bombing of Pearl Harbor and, through his contact with Japanese people, realized the war was moving towards Palau.¹⁴¹

Peleliu was a major American target because of its airstrip. Early in the morning of March 30, a young woman in Peleliu saw planes flying overhead. They seemed to be shooting at each other. She could see the *Hinomaru*, the Japanese sun-flag, on the smaller ones and she thought it must be an air-show or a game. However she suddenly noticed that the bigger planes had a different flag, a star, and the smaller ones were firing their guns at them. At that time she

didn't know that the shots could kill. I didn't know what was going on - that you could die from these things...A lot of the Japanese who were at the airport got killed. They would just throw them inside a big drum and transport them to the dock and since my house was on the side of the road, I could see them passing by.¹⁴²

An older woman, Obechou Delutaach, also ran out to the beach to see what was happening. She stared in awe as one of the big planes tumbled out of the sky and crashed into the ocean. Two parachutes followed, but a Japanese fighter flew through their strings and cut them so the men plummeted into the sea. Another plane was shot down and smashed into one of the small islands off Peleliu and exploded. Obechou began to feel afraid and thought of the rumours she had heard and realized that "this is probably war. War starting." She was told by the Japanese soldiers that she should find shelter, so she and her family went to a cave under one of the Rock Islands. The cave was quite large and very strong so they felt they were safe from the planes.¹⁴³

On Angaur, as the planes bombed and strafed the phosphate plant and then the Japanese buildings, Robert Eldukl hid in an underground tunnel. Before the raid he was one of a party of about six Palauans working for the Japanese digging out these tunnels.¹⁴⁴ Sixteen year old Mathias Akitaya and his family also escaped to caves the Japanese had ordered them to excavate prior to March. Others who were unprepared

¹⁴¹Fumio Rengiil (M 1917) : KRW Interview 2 November 1990, Koror, Palau.

¹⁴²Woman, Peleliu.

¹⁴³Obechou Delutaach (W 1917) : KRW Interview 21 November 1990, Koror, Palau.

¹⁴⁴Robert Eldukl (M 1917) : KRW Interview 27 November, Angaur, Palau.

took shelter in the jungle, hiding near the bigger trees.¹⁴⁵ Sister Elene Ebud remembers seeing the planes coming over that day.

We see so many planes "Oh, they are coming to help us" we say "They are coming to help us all" and [then] a plane got shot and there was fire...and we say "This is enemies" because we know then that it is America plane. They [the Japanese] shoot at it and it is the first time for us to see this...we run away, we were very afraid.¹⁴⁶

After this first bombing raid, the Japanese began to evacuate Palauans from both the southern islands.¹⁴⁷ One woman remembers that after the March attack she first moved to the Rock Islands off Peleliu. She and her family lived in a hut there during the day and sheltered in a cave at night. It was not long before the Japanese came to tell them that they could not stay and had to find somewhere else to go.

About 4 or 5 o' clock in the morning the Japanese got us on a small boat and then we went up to Ngeremenglui and from there we walked up to Ngaraard.¹⁴⁸

Obechou Delutaach also took refuge off Peleliu after the March raid. She and her family went to an island close to her home where they built makeshift huts. There was a cave nearby but they never needed to use it as the planes did not come to the island during that time. They were not far from Peleliu so the men and women would paddle there each day to collect food. As the danger of further American attacks increased, the people were transported by boat to Ngaraard. Obechou understood the decision to move had been made by the Japanese, in consultation with the high chiefs.¹⁴⁹ For some it was the first time they had left Peleliu. One woman remembered "I didn't really want to leave Peleliu. I didn't want to go up to Babeldaob".¹⁵⁰ Obechou did not

¹⁴⁵Mathias Akitaya (M 1928).

¹⁴⁶Sister Elene Ebud (W 1917) : KRW Interview 26 November 1990, Koror, Palau.

¹⁴⁷Higuchi, *Micronesians and the Pacific War: The Palauans* in Ballendorf, Shuster and Higuchi, p. 88.

¹⁴⁸Woman, Peleliu.

¹⁴⁹Obechou Delutaach.

¹⁵⁰Woman, Peleliu.

wish to leave her home either, "but I had no choice because I was afraid".¹⁵¹ Most evacuees from Peleliu were able to join relatives and if they had none on Babeldaob, they would stay with any household that did not have too many people to look after already.¹⁵²

Baiei Babul was working at Malakal when it was bombed during March. After the raid, he returned to his home in Peleliu, but the soldiers soon told him that he had to leave. They said he had to go to Babeldaob, "because of the war...Peleliu was going to get the worst of it".¹⁵³ The last people to leave Peleliu were labourers who were working for the Japanese, rebuilding the airstrip and excavating caves and tunnels in the hills. Francisco Morei and 25 other Peleliuan men worked on these projects until the second carrier strike at the end of July. After that the Japanese decided that they too should be moved away.¹⁵⁴

After the March attack, the Japanese informed the people of Angaur that they would have to leave their island. Ngkeruker Salii first went to Oll, a province between Ngarchelong and Ngaraard where she had kin.¹⁵⁵ Others, like Jiro Alfredo went to Ngatpang, which had become the primary headquarters for the Japanese military.¹⁵⁶ Mathias Akitaya remembered that there was a "decree" from the soldiers that all the Angaurese should leave the island.

Actually my mother didn't want to leave Angaur. My father [who was Japanese] was there too and he didn't want to leave Angaur. But around the end of July, since it was a decree from the soldiers they had to force us to leave, but then there were no boats allowed in the channel between Peleliu and Angaur, so we were kind of stranded. We had decided to stay, but around that time, no boats were allowed anyway, so we had to stay.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵¹Obechou Delutaach.

¹⁵²Woman, Peleliu.

¹⁵³Baiei Babul.

¹⁵⁴Francisco Morei, (M 1922) in Donald R. Shuster, "Wartime Employment for Palauans" in Ballendorf, Shuster and Higuchi, p. 53.

¹⁵⁵Ngkeruker Salii (W 1902) : KRW Interview 2 November 1990, Koror, Palau.

¹⁵⁶Jiro Alfredo : Interview 18 March 1985 in Ballendorf, Shuster and Higuchi, p. 153.

¹⁵⁷Mathias Akitaya.

Mathias and his family were one of only a small number who stayed behind on Angaur. The others settled into Babeldaob as best they could and waited for the day that the war would end and they could return to their homes.

*

Despite the American raids between June and mid-September, the war was still, at this time, largely exterior to Palauan life. Regular bombing was confined to the town of Koror and military facilities at Malakal Harbour and Airai and Peleliu airfields, while the general strafing of the whole island area occurred only for a four day period in July and a week in September. The war was localized. Thus, although it intruded into and severely disrupted their lives, many Palauans, after the initial shock, still returned to their homes, or continued to work and attend school. In a sense, the war was still outside, as Palau remained entirely under Japanese control.

After September when the Americans seized Peleliu and Angaur, regular day and night raids against Babeldaob began. The planes only had to come a short distance from the southern islands and they came everyday, almost without fail. Bombing and strafing were widespread and constant, covering the whole island area, not just Koror and the airfields. During this time Palauans were forced to incorporate the war into the very centre of their lives. They hid in the jungle, and struggled to survive within the confines American planes and Japanese troops forced upon them. Life was turned back to front. Day became more dangerous than night so it was in the darkness that people worked and foraged for food. In some sense, during this extended period, the violence gradually became regular and expected, a 'known evil'. The inverted world of war became 'normal'.

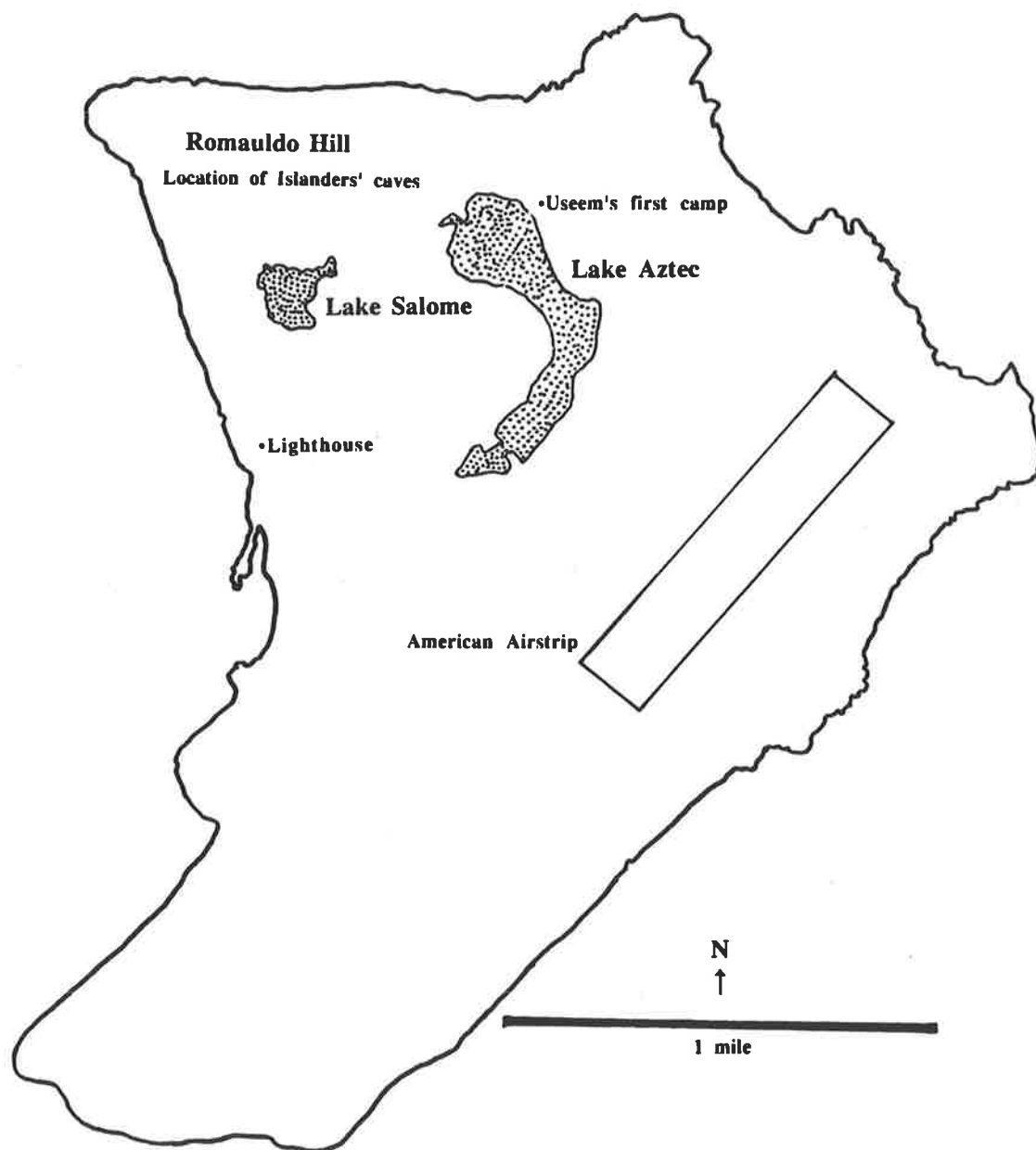
For the people in refuge on Babeldaob, the war continued, through month after month of bombing and famine. Peace came sooner for those left behind on Angaur, but so too did the real and intense horror of the war. In September, Delirang, the woman who had crammed herself in between the rocks and covered her ears in terror

during the "first war", now cautiously looked out, across to the southern islands.

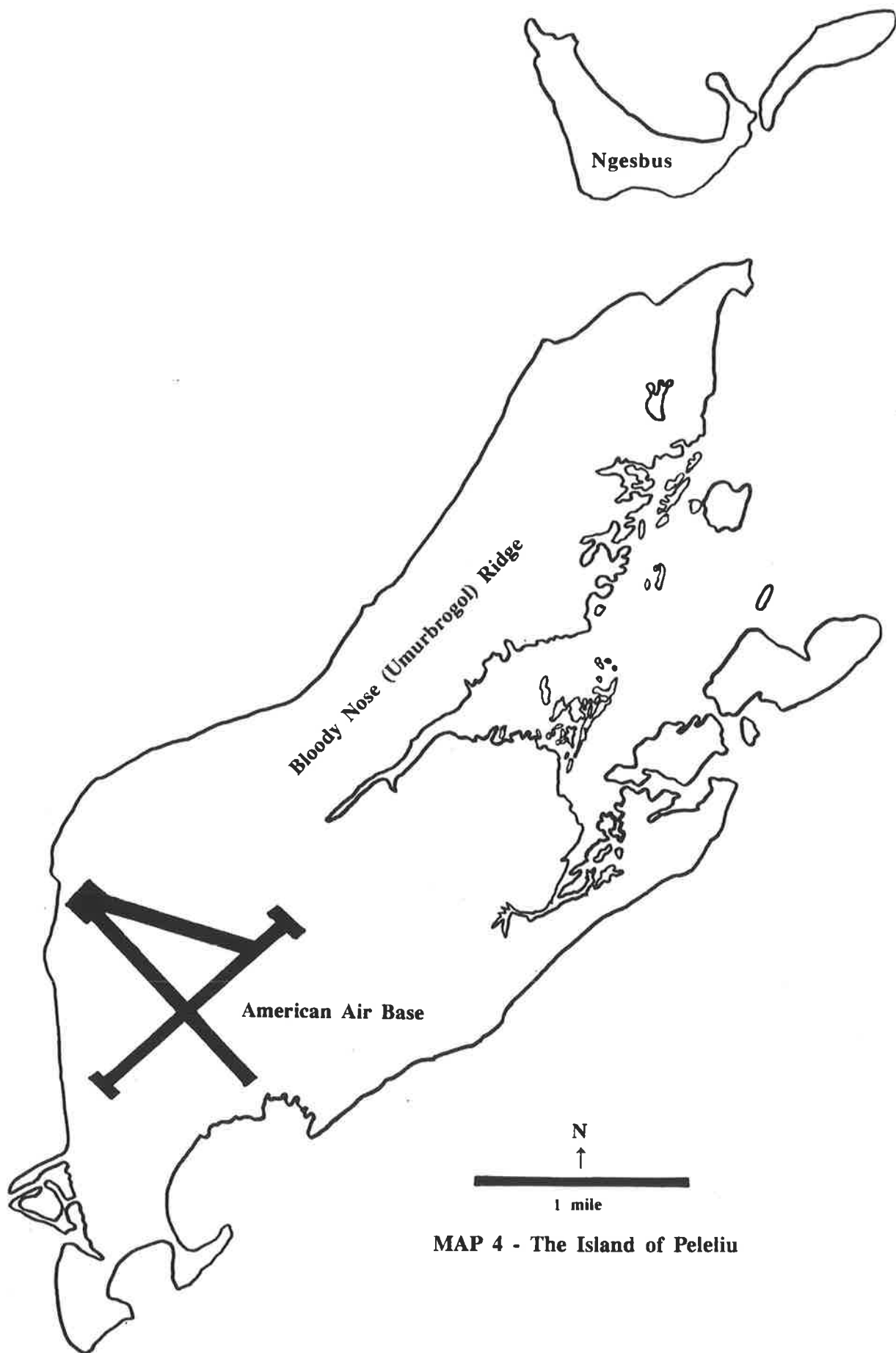
Even though it was still daylight on her Rock Island,

it would seem that it was night already at Peleliu...because when you look out into the reef, the deep sea beyond the reef, you would think that there was a big rock, a black land that just sits there in the smoke...¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁸Delirang.



MAP 3 - The Island of Angaur



MAP 4 - The Island of Peleliu

Chapter Two

THE BLACK LANDS

**Angaur and Peleliu
September - December 1944.**

As the blackness of night faded into pre-dawn dimness, the vague outlines of Angaur could be discerned and it appeared that the whole island was erupting, so fast were the big guns pumping in high explosive shells...Soon fires were started on Angaur and most of the island was clearly visible in the eerie light of the flames and shell bursts.¹

On the morning of 17 September 1944, the land of Angaur was lit by a false dawn as explosions from naval gunfire reverberated over the island. There had been bombing before and planes firing their guns had swooped low over town, harbour and jungle. During those earlier raids, Masao Guiliberte had escaped to man-made tunnels, but this time they did not provide enough protection. He, his family and a number of other Palauans were forced to retreat into a deep natural cave. Fifty feet under the ground, it was "pretty dark" and damp. It seemed safe, but even there "some people still got hurt".²

Through the air raids of June and July, sixteen year old Mathias Akitaya and his family had remained in their home, retreating into nearby caves when they heard the planes. The big bombers came regularly between 10 pm and midnight, and not until the skies became quiet again could everyone come out. It was only after the majority of the people of Angaur were ordered to leave and take refuge on Babeldaob that those who remained sought out more protected shelters in the rocky northern end of the island. Like many others, the Akitaya family built a makeshift hut, just four posts and a roof over the top, at the front of a natural cave. Days were spent in the hut because it was still relatively safe, but at night they huddled into the cave. In the morning, when there were no planes, some people would go out to collect tapioca, cook it, and bring it back to the others. If the planes appeared during daylight hours, they could run to the shelter of the rocks. Mathias remembers that the cave was quite cramped, only about

¹ The 81st Wildcat Division Historical Committee, p. 68.

² Masao Guiliberte (M 1922) : KRW Interview 27 November 1990, Angaur, Palau.

seven feet high and eight feet long and wide - "a place for crabs! We had to squeeze the crabs outside and we had to go inside".³

During early September conditions worsened at Angaur as the American forces prepared for the landing on nearby Peleliu, which was to precede the invasion of Angaur. Weeks of softening up strikes by Army Air Force bombers were followed by the intensive September Carrier strike.⁴ Mathias recalls that at that time

there was a cave for all the people, like a community cave...and at that time it got so bad that all the people had to go out from their own caves and go inside that place. Ships started to fire their guns and planes started to bomb at the centre of Angaur because they [the Americans] were starting to come up to Angaur.⁵

At the break of day on 12 September 1944, three days before D-Day for Peleliu, the pre-landing bombardment began. Battleships, light cruisers and destroyers pounded the islands with shells, stripping the jungle. Fighters from carrier and escort carrier groups struck the airstrip on Babeldaob and swept constantly over the two islands, while Torpedo bombers attacked Koror and Malakal Harbours.⁶ For five days shells and bombs pierced the island of Angaur. Robert Eldukl remembers that

the first bombings that came were directed at the big buildings that belonged to the Phosphate Company and there was a big tower there. They were also bombing at the tower.⁷

The destruction and crumbling of this "tower" - the lighthouse on Angaur - on the fifth day of bombardment (16 September) was a "spectacular event" for the navy and a message was quipped between the bombarding ships : "Success in forcing the Japs to give up lighthousekeeping was noted with applause of all hands".⁸

³Mathias Akitaya (M 1928).

⁴See Chapter One.

⁵Mathias Akitaya.

⁶See Samuel Eliot Morison, *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II Volume XII : Leyte, June 1944-January 1945*. (Little Brown and Co., Boston, 1958) p. 34, 39, 44, Craven & Cate, *Volume Five*..., pp. 307-308 & Sherrod, p. 255.

⁷Robert Eldukl (M 1917).

⁸Quoted in The 81st Wildcat Division Historical Committee, p. 67.

Not long before, the 81st Infantry Division had received the significant information that it had been released from its role as a reserve for the Peleliu operation and the men were to ready themselves for the planned assault against Angaur. The 1st Marine Division had secured the airfield on Peleliu and the battle, although still fierce and bloody, was considered to be proceeding satisfactorily. It was decided that the 81st would land on Angaur the next morning, Sunday 17 September.⁹

In March 1944 American Intelligence had estimated a population on Angaur of over 450 Islanders and 1,856 Japanese civilians. By August however these numbers had dropped as most Islanders and many Japanese men and women had transferred to Babeldaob. Of those Japanese men who were left, most had been moved to Peleliu and Ngesbus to labour on the airfields.¹⁰ Major Goto Ushio and about 1,400 soldiers of the First Battalion, Fifty-Ninth Infantry Regiment remained on Angaur to hold the island against the Americans.¹¹

By early September the Angaurese, the other Islanders¹² and the Japanese civilians had taken cover in the larger rockshelters. People rarely ventured out.

If we go out, what would we do? Where would we go? There is no sense in going out. We would just have to stay in...We were all inside the cave. We didn't even know what was going on outside. Even if the Americans came over and took over Angaur, we would not have known it.¹³

Just prior to the landing of the first wave of troops, the naval bombardment increased in intensity.

Fires burning all over Angaur [sent] up billows of black smoke. At each burst of large-caliber shell, dust, dirt and debris [was] thrown high into the air. At times, large trees or major portions of them [could] be seen flying about like matchsticks.¹⁴

⁹Ibid. pp. 66-7.

¹⁰The 81st Wildcat Division Historical Committee, p. 54.

¹¹Peattie, p. 293.

¹²Chamorros from Saipan, Yapese, Trukese and Ulithians were on Angaur, employed by the Japanese to work in the phosphate mines.

¹³Mathias Akitaya.

¹⁴The 81st Wildcat Division Historical Committee, p. 70.

Within the shelters the Islanders could see nothing, though the noise was deafening.¹⁵ Smoke hung low in the sky and the earth shuddered with the force of explosions.¹⁶ The cave in which Robert Eldukl now took refuge was not really a 'cave' at all. It was not completely closed in or water-tight, but was more

like two sides of big rocks standing together...there were openings and sometimes bullets would come inside...But we were at the end...the shape was like this [V shape], two rocks meeting, long and narrow, so that there was a gap in the middle and the bombs could come in.¹⁷

The smoke from the explosions seeped into these "corners of rock" and all the people could do was wait in fear to see what happened. They could not even talk during the bombardment because of the noise.¹⁸

The first American troops landed early on the morning of 17 September, making slow progress through the debris from the shelling, the fallen trees, the tangled wire and dense jungle growth, the dust and the land mines.¹⁹ Lieutenant John Useem, the man who was to be responsible for the inhabitants of this battlefield once they had been coaxed out of hiding and into American hands, recalls coming ashore in the third wave of assault troops.²⁰ He had been present during the landings on Saipan in June and his initial emotion in being amongst the complexity and confusion of the battle was, "Well, here I am again". He "went in with the anxieties of war", but he had been trained for nine months in the operation and administration of military government at Columbia University²¹, so he was confident in that area and "intent to get [his] part of the

¹⁵Woman (1926) present and contributing during Masao Guiliberte Interview & Sister Elene Ebud (W 1917).

¹⁶The 81st Wildcat Division Historical Committee, p. 70.

¹⁷Robert Eldukl.

¹⁸Woman in Masao Guiliberte Interview.

¹⁹The 81st Wildcat Division Historical Committee, pp. 72-73.

²⁰John Useem : KRW Interview 5-7 July 1990, East Lansing, Michigan, USA. (Hereafter this series of interviews is referred to as 'John Useem').

²¹This was the initial course in Military Administration run by the Navy Department. It commenced in August 1942. The very first American training programme in military government was developed by the US Army at the University of Virginia in May 1942. See Arnold G. Fisch Jr., *Military Government in the Ryukyu Islands 1945-1950*. (Army Historical Series, Center of Military History,

position and responsibilities under way".²² His first task was to make contact with the commanding officer of the operation. As the Islanders were in hiding and, during this very beginning of the battle only a few Japanese civilians had straggled out, the officer told him to "Do whatever you like".

Useem's team of military government personnel did not disembark until the following day. This group of 9 officers and 28 enlisted men were told facetiously by command that they were "surplus", because no Islanders had yet been seen.²³ Interrogations of the few Japanese prisoners of war, however, provided information that all the inhabitants of Angaur had taken shelter in caves on the northwest tip of the island.²⁴ So Useem went out to find a place to set up a camp, to care for the few Japanese civilians and to make preparations for the Islanders to come.²⁵

All that first day until dark, and again "at the first glimmer of dawn" on the 18th, the Navy continued to shell, planes swept overhead dropping bombs, firing rockets and strafing.²⁶ Beginning at 6 am the land was bombarded for three hours before the 81st Division's soldiers began their second day of fighting through the extremely rough terrain and against fierce counterattacks by the Japanese. As they pushed inland and northwards, they were aided by continuing air strikes, including bombing and strafing runs, as well as supporting naval gunfire.²⁷

Sister Elene Ebud had taken refuge in the rocky north of Angaur, scrambling down into the narrow spaces between the rocks. She could hear the roar of the planes and the

Boom, boom, boom from the ship, the cannons and machine guns... and they shoot from the boats and everything went down

US Army, Washington DC, 1988) pp. 5-15. For further information on Navy schools see also Richard, *Volume 1* ..., pp. 46-67.

²²John Useem.

²³Richard, *Volume 1* ..., p. 611.

²⁴Ibid. pp. 611-612.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶The 81st Wildcat Division Historical Committee, p. 79 & *War Diary MAG 11*, October 1944.

²⁷The 81st Wildcat Division Historical Committee, p. 80ff.

and then the plane shoots also and they throw out the bombs. There was smoke and somebody died and we were very afraid and we just prayed for our Lord to help us.²⁸

Night and day no-one could sleep because of the noise and the constant terror of what was to come. Sister Elene had been in Koror in July and August. Just before she was to return to Angaur on a boat with a group of soldiers, the priest there had told her that the most important task she had to perform was to baptize the babies. He feared for Angaur and he told her she must protect the children. She followed his orders. As most Islanders had been evacuated to Babeldaob, there were only a few young people amongst those left behind. As the days passed and hunger and thirst became a greater problem, the food was divided out - mainly dry rice and small Japanese cookies. Elene made sure a little more was set aside for the children.²⁹

The air strikes and naval bombardment continued 24 hours a day. By the fourth day the southern end of the island was secured and the fighting was focussed in the north, the "toughest terrain on the island,"³⁰ where the Japanese had fortified themselves and where the Islanders had taken refuge. The day before American troops had pushed through the Middle Village area, where they found a ration dump concealed in the church.³¹ Before the invasion, Robert Eldukl had been part of a team that had been hiding food in different locations around the island.

A Japanese soldier was responsible for the team. He was leader...there were about five or six other Palauans who were working with the team, there was about three Japanese who were giving us the locations.³²

The food was stowed in numerous places, so if Americans captured one stockpile there was another point to go to for food. "We relied on those foods that we were distributing among hidden places".³³ During the early period in the caves, groups of

²⁸Sister Elene Ebud.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰The 81st Wildcat Division Historical Committee, pp. 96 & 98.

³¹Ibid. p. 88.

³²Robert Eldukl.

³³Ibid.

men ventured out at night to collect food supplies. However it was not long before the last rations were burned.

One night we were going to get the food and when we went there, from about one hundred feet we could see that something was wrong where the food was and one of the Japanese soldiers went and they informed us that all the food was burned...We didn't have any food left, so the Japanese told us 'Now we will have to learn to eat all kinds of leaves and roots'.³⁴

Masao Guiliberte recalls that he and the others in his shelter ate very little,

mostly uncooked rice and water - the little bit of water that we could find running on the rocks...Fear, because of fear, we didn't really care about that. We didn't really know that we were really hungry.³⁵

Some of the Islanders had small Japanese cooking burners which they used to prepare what rice they had. When there was no water they would fry the rice dry. If there was a little water available they would boil it, but that was very rare.³⁶

On 20 September the Americans declared Angaur "officially secure". For the men of the 81st, this meant very little. It was "something like crossing the Equator, important but imperceptible".³⁷ The fighting, now called "mopping up", continued fierce and unabated. Artillery bombardment was now focussed on the Japanese stronghold in the north and the firing became heavier and more intense³⁸. For the Islanders, the fact that Angaur was now considered securely in American hands meant only that conditions became much worse. Now, "the Japanese and the Palauans were at the front line together".³⁹

The situation was also precarious for Useem and his military government team. He had established his camp near the American front line. He chose this location for a

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Masao Guiliberte.

³⁶Mathias Akitaya.

³⁷The 81st Wildcat Division Historical Committee, p. 101.

³⁸Ibid. p. 100.

³⁹Mathias Akitaya.

number of reasons. He knew he had to be close to the action in order to care for the civilians as soon as they emerged. In addition, the medical corpsmen who were part of his unit had been seconded to work for the combat troops.⁴⁰ The aid stations and medical facilities at which these personnel were now stationed were also very close to the fighting.⁴¹ He was certain any civilians who did come out would require immediate medical attention. Once he had selected a site, at the northern end of Aztec Lake close to the 81st Division prisoner of war stockade, he brought in his men and supplies and started to construct a makeshift camp of tents and tarpaulins.⁴²

Useem was on his own in terms of command. "There was no-one to ask - everyone was too preoccupied...American military organization has a very hierarchical structure...so once I was in charge, *I was in charge*."⁴³ Building the camp meant planning and organizing everything, right down to establishing how to dig latrines in shallow ground. During this time his group was also responsible for clearing the area of live ammunition and other debris, which was a dangerous task. At the time there was nowhere for him to store live ammunition, so he slept with it piled in the corner of his tent. The fighting was close. American mortars were firing from positions next to his camp.⁴⁴

From 20 September until early October, heavy artillery was aimed, day and night, at the north of Angaur - the Angaur Bowl and the Romauldo Hill area. Mathias Akitaya recalls that one day the bombardment was so intense, that "there was so much smoke that it got so dark. It was 12 o'clock in the afternoon!...We Palauans inside the cave , we could not see each other".⁴⁵ They discovered that a huge rock had fallen into the middle of the shelter; that was why they were unable to make contact with each other.

⁴⁰John Useem.

⁴¹The 81st Wildcat Division Historical Committee, p. 102.

⁴²John Useem & Richard, *Volume I*..., p. 612.

⁴³John Useem.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*

⁴⁵Mathias Akitaya.

It was difficult to breathe in the dust and smoke, "like being in the mine."⁴⁶ Moments later they realized the situation was even worse. Akitaya recalls

underneath the big rock that had fallen...there was a bomb - big, huge, underneath. And if that exploded you wouldn't be able to talk with me today because I would have been gone!...We weren't able to do anything because it was still very hot, so we went to ask the [Japanese] soldiers to do something about it. They said not until after five hours. So then they came and took it away.⁴⁷

The rocks could not provide complete protection. Kesiil Kaich was shot in the arm while she was in the cave and still carries the scar today.⁴⁸ On 7 October, Mathias Akitaya and his sister were near the entrance to their shelter when a shell exploded nearby. The sister's leg was smashed and Mathias was hit in the back.⁴⁹ Some Islanders, including Sister Elene's cousin, were killed by shrapnel and bullets.⁵⁰

Sometimes this painful monotony of noise, fear, smoke, hunger and thirst was briefly broken. Within the cramped shelter where Sister Elene took refuge, a child was born. Hideko, a relative of Elene's, delivered a child in the midst of the artillery bombardment. Elene recalls that the guns went "Boom! And the baby came out and I say "You are Kantaro" - Japanese word for 'inside the cave'."⁵¹

As the days passed the Islanders ate "close to nothing" and the lack of water became almost unbearable.⁵² The 81st began to take Japanese prisoners and interrogation revealed the critical shortage of water. One soldier, Private Ikeda, was caught when he walked into an American landing craft searching for water to drink.⁵³ The only water to which the Islanders and the Japanese had access was the small

⁴⁶The phosphate mines in which many Palauans had worked on Angaur.

⁴⁷Mathias Akitaya. This incident was also mentioned by Masao Guiliberte and another woman present during that interview.

⁴⁸Kesiil Kaich in Masao Guiliberte interview.

⁴⁹Mathias Akitaya.

⁵⁰Sister Elene Ebud.

⁵¹Ibid.

⁵²Mathias Akitaya.

⁵³The 81st Wildcat Division Historical Committee, p. 107.

amount dripping down the walls of the shelter and collecting in the crevices of the rocks.⁵⁴ Beyond this, men had to risk going out at night to the marshy area around Lake Salome, right on the front line, to collect slightly salty water. Mathias' older brother would occasionally venture out with a few others, usually between six and eight at night when it was already dark.⁵⁵

Two Japanese prisoners, taken by the American troops, spoke of the severity of the water shortage and explained that the soldiers too, relied on the brackish water from the lake and what little fresh water they could find in pools amongst the rocks.⁵⁶ It rained rarely, but on the night of 22 September there was a heavy downpour, much to the dismay of the Americans, who were hoping that thirst would drive the enemy out or force them to surrender.⁵⁷ For John Useem the storm was also unwelcome, because it meant he and his men were working sometimes "up to our knees in mud", as they continued to prepare for the arrival of the Islanders.⁵⁸

Mathias, however, recalls the great relief he felt on occasions when it rained. As the shelter was not water-tight the rain came in through the gap at the top and washed down the rocks.

One night I was sitting, leaning against the rough stone. My back was hurting but I was sleeping. That was nice, that was considered a perfect place to sleep at the time (laughs) and as I was sleeping there were drops of water dripping down onto my stomach so I had a big bowl, a Palauan bowl carved out of wood, so all night I held that bowl, waiting for each drop to fall and finally it filled the bowl, and that was the time we drank pure water. That was the most water we ever could have come close to.⁵⁹

A Japanese soldier, captured on the day before this rain storm, revealed to the Americans that "the natives were hiding in deep caves and were under the control of the

⁵⁴Masao Guiliberte.

⁵⁵Mathias Akitaya.

⁵⁶The 81st Wildcat Division Historical Committee, p. 112.

⁵⁷Ibid. p. 110

⁵⁸John Useem.

⁵⁹Mathias Akitaya.

Japanese Commander".⁶⁰ Islanders and Japanese took refuge in separate caves. Some Japanese civilians stayed in the same place as the Angaurese, but the military were in a different area. Despite this separation, the Islanders were still supervised by Japanese soldiers, who paid regular visits.⁶¹ At first Robert Eldukl had been cautioned by these Japanese soldiers that the Americans were "fierce people". They told the Islanders that if they tried to go to the other side, the American soldiers would certainly hurt them or kill them. The soldiers also warned "If you go, we will kill you". There seemed to be no escape. People were very afraid and unsure of what they should or could do.⁶² Mathias too remembered being informed by soldiers that the Americans were "cruel people" who would "beat up" Islanders who surrendered to them. He believed at that time that Americans had "dirty hearts".⁶³

On 24 September, the Americans made their first broadcast to induce the Japanese to surrender. It was followed by an extremely intensive three minute bombardment to show the alternative. A second broadcast was then made, this time from a landing craft cruising along the northern coast. The Americans hoped that this would allow them to establish contact with the Islanders.⁶⁴ There was some fear that the Japanese may be "holding the people against their will".⁶⁵ It was felt they might be in as much danger from their captors as from American bombing.⁶⁶ Robert Eldukl heard this broadcast. It was in Japanese and he thought that it was the voice of one of the captured Japanese soldiers. The voice urged the Islanders and the Japanese to come out of the caves and announced that there was lots of food and clothing for them if they did.⁶⁷

⁶⁰The 81st Wildcat Division Historical Committee, p. 107.

⁶¹Masao Guiliberte.

⁶²Robert Eldukl.

⁶³Mathias Akitaya. Palauans refer to a cruel person as having a "dirty heart" meaning an "evil heart".

⁶⁴The 81st Wildcat Division Historical Committee, p. 111.

⁶⁵Richard, *Volume 1*..., p. 612.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*

⁶⁷Robert Eldukl.

With the expectations the Islanders had of what the Americans would do to them, it is not surprising that they did not react to this first appeal. One Japanese soldier who had given himself up earlier, however, did attempt to show the Americans the locations of the Islanders' refuges and the caves of the Japanese on an aerial photograph. He also reported the continued and severe shortage of food and water.⁶⁸

Mathias recalls that one of the other reasons why Palauans were afraid to venture out was because

the Americans had a high place where they could watch us, the Palauans and the Japanese. There was a line in between us and the Americans that the Americans put down, that when somebody touches it a light goes on and that's when the Americans shoot.⁶⁹

The Americans laid out booby traps, barbed wire and other devices to restrict Japanese movements. Included among these were trip flares, the "line" to which Mathias refers. Many Japanese were killed in this way, but no Palauans.⁷⁰

The trauma of thirst, however, led Japanese soldiers to make frequent attempts to cross the combat lines despite the danger, and the 81st began to take more prisoners.⁷¹ Both Masao Guilberte and Robert Eldukl tell of incidents where a Japanese soldier suggested that it might be better for them too, if they tried to escape across the lines to the Americans. On these occasions the soldiers did not mention the cruelty of Americans as they had previously. As the situation worsened perhaps the soldiers realized that everyone in the caves was destined to die of thirst, hunger or by enemy fire, so the Islanders might as well try to save themselves. On the other hand the severe shortage of water may have been the reason behind the advice. If the Islanders left, there would be fewer people to share the small amount of water and food available. Masao remembers that

⁶⁸The 81st Wildcat Division Historical Committee, p. 112. Japanese soldiers giving strategic information to the enemy when captured was not unusual. See Lynette D. Zeitz, *No Half-Hearted Soldiers : The Japanese Army's experience of defeat in the South West Pacific 1942-45*. (MA thesis, University of Adelaide, 1992) pp. 202-203.

⁶⁹Mathias Akitaya.

⁷⁰The 81st Wildcat Division Historical Committee, p. 127.

⁷¹Ibid. p. 120.

We got along with them most of the time, but during the actual fighting because of the soldiers' experience of hunger, most of the ordinary lower ranked soldiers were very rough on us, just because of food. But the officers, some even shared their own food. One of the officers, the second in command here actually told me that "You people, you don't have any part in this war. You should go out to meet the Americans because if you stay here, we are all going to die."⁷²

Similarly Mathias, whose father was Japanese, remembered that although he had been warned of American cruelty by some of the military, there was one Japanese soldier "who was good to us". He suggested that it would be better for them to go to the Americans, because death was certain if they stayed where they were.⁷³

On 1 October the Americans held a ceremony to declare the establishment of Military Government on the island of Angaur. The American flag was raised and a small band played the Star Spangled Banner. Useem had in fact raised the first American flag on Angaur before this ceremony. This action upset the commanding officer, as Useem had unwittingly usurped the officer's authority. Worse still, a reporter working for the *Chicago Tribune* and *The New York Times* was visiting at the time. He recorded the story, took photos and published them in the United States.⁷⁴

The raising of the American flag did not stop the fighting, and the Islanders, over whose land military government was now proclaimed, still did not emerge from the caves. It was decided that another attempt should be made, via the broadcast system, to induce surrender.⁷⁵ No Japanese appeared, but six Islanders straggled out, one man, two women and three children.⁷⁶ They were weak with malnutrition and very frightened. The leader was a Chamorro man, Ramon Cabrera, who headed the small group because he knew a little English. As they emerged, the Americans, seeing sudden movement, fired in their direction, wounding the man in the arm. Courageously the man kept walking forward, with his hand raised, calling out in his

⁷²Robert Eldukl.

⁷³Mathias Akitaya.

⁷⁴John Useem.

⁷⁵The 81st Wildcat Division Historical Committee, pp. 121 & 122.

⁷⁶Ibid. p. 122.

limited English. If he had panicked at that moment and run back towards the caves, the soldiers may have opened fire and killed the whole group.⁷⁷ For a brief period all firing ceased as the small group was rescued and taken to the 17th Field Hospital area.⁷⁸ Useem received word almost immediately. He was called to headquarters, where the people had later been taken, and told "There they are. Take them." He managed to get them to the camp and set up tents for their protection.

They were terribly frightened of us. They'd been told by the Japanese that we were going to rape the women and murder the men...They were extremely hungry. Their clothes were ragged...I decided the thing we had to do first was to take care of their bodies, which we did and we were still under combat situation. I could walk across the road and there were mortars firing.⁷⁹

It was to be quite a few days before Useem had to deal with a larger group of Islanders. The leader of this first small group tried to guide a platoon of soldiers to the area of the caves, but he became lost and disoriented in amongst the shattered, bare rocks. The Intelligence Officer also asked Ramon Cabrera to write a letter, in Japanese, to the Islanders and civilians still in hiding, telling them that it was safe to come out because the Americans would protect them.⁸⁰ Intelligence knew from interrogations of Japanese prisoners and from these civilians that at least one hundred Islanders were still in hiding and they were willing to try any method to convince them to give themselves up.⁸¹

The war went on, seven more days of bombardment and fighting. The Palauans, still in their caves, barely moved, but the severity of the attacks led some people to realize there was no hope if they stayed where they were. American engineer battalions were working under dangerous conditions close to the front lines, constructing roads to

⁷⁷Henry (Hank) Worswick (M 1921) : KRW Interview 24 November 1990, Koror, Palau. Hank was a Motor Machinist's Mate in the US Navy. He was on a landing craft during the Peleliu operation and then volunteered to go to Angaur to run the power plant there.

⁷⁸The 81st Wildcat Division Historical Committee, p. 122 & Richard, *Volume 1...*, p. 612.

⁷⁹John Useem.

⁸⁰See Richard, *Volume 1...*, p. 612 for full text of this letter.

⁸¹The 81st Wildcat Division Historical Committee, p. 122.

make the task of reaching the enemy easier. At noon on 8 October, eight days after the first Islanders had emerged,

construction work was interrupted by natives, eighty-seven of whom straggled out of the caves and crevices to deliver themselves into the custody of the crews of Company B, 306th Engineers.⁸²

Robert Eldukl, Sister Elene and Masao Guiliberte were among the Islanders in this group. After Eldukl had been told by one of the Japanese soldiers that it would be a good idea to go to the Americans, he and others began to consider it. The situation in the caves was almost unbearable. They had heard the broadcasts which said they would not be harmed and that there was plenty of food and water available for them in the American camp. They were still afraid and unsure. Robert Eldukl remembers that once they finally decided to go, they planned to do so secretly, tricking the Japanese soldiers.

There was another cave that we knew and we told the soldiers that the cave we were staying in at the moment was safe and if they could bring the soldiers here because they were getting injured and wounded...so it would be better that they brought them here and we went to the other cave. And so we were able to do that and when we were pretending that we were on our way to the other cave, we came to the Americans.⁸³

By suggesting that their cave was actually a safer location for the Japanese wounded they manipulated the Japanese into thinking that the move was a good idea, reducing any suspicion of the Islanders' motives.

Sister Elene remembers that on 8 October she realized "This is the day. We have to go." Everyone felt it would be safer to carry very little, in case they had to run, so Elene tied up her few belongings in an old Japanese flag. She had been told months before by the Father in Koror that if they were forced to face the enemy they should carry a white cloth to use in surrender. All she could find was a small piece of white material which had been used to wrap up a few Japanese cookies, the only food they had left. They chose a Trukese man and another older man to approach the Americans

⁸²Ibid. pp. 126-127.

⁸³Robert Eldukl.

first, because both spoke a little English. Once these men had established it was safe, the rest of the group followed.⁸⁴

The Islanders of this second group concluded that their only chance for survival was to move away from the front line and try to surrender to the Americans. Their motivation was desperation and the will to live. They did not make a clear decision to turn against the Japanese and join the American side. They knew almost nothing of the Americans. They had only experienced the power and destruction of their weaponry. The Japanese had warned of American brutality. The offer of food and shelter which the Americans had broadcast, could easily be a trick designed to bring them out to be killed. Yet, despite these fears, the group chose to risk their future on the other side, the unknown, rather than await certain death in the caves.

As they approached the enemy soldiers they were extremely frightened, because the Americans looked so different. Sister Elene was struck by how tall they were. She had only known Japanese who were all short in comparison. She was also confused to see the grown male soldiers handing out and eating 'candy', "because that was in Japanese time only for children!"⁸⁵

Masao Guiliberte and Kesiil Kaich also came out on that day. Kesiil was still nursing her wounded arm and was taken straight to the hospital.⁸⁶ One woman remembers "riding on a car" which took many of the Islanders to the hospital, while others went to a place where the soldiers had set up tents for them.⁸⁷ Masao was shocked by the size of the Americans.

Some of us were afraid because the Americans were big and it was hot and they only wore shorts and because of the sun they were all wearing sunglasses and their skin had turned red.⁸⁸

⁸⁴They had learned a little English during German times.

⁸⁵Sister Elene.

⁸⁶Kesiil Kaich.

⁸⁷Kesiil Kaich and Woman present in Masao Guiliberte Interview.

⁸⁸Masao Guiliberte.

The group of Islanders immediately became the responsibility of Lieutenant Useem and his men. He found that within this group were not only Palauans, but also Chamorros from Guam, people from Yap, Ulithi and Sonsorol.

They were all mixed up and they were terribly frightened of us. The Japanese Army had treated them as what was left over. They were thirsty, they were hungry, they were injured, they were dying. They were in all states and they were extremely frightened.⁸⁹

Useem had to learn quickly "how to feed them, clothe them, protect them". Nearly everything concerning these people was his responsibility. Useem's language officer, Francis Mahoney, a gentle and "intense" man, was forced to work extremely hard as interpreter during these first few days, using his knowledge of Japanese.⁹⁰ During this time, security was also an issue. The remaining Japanese were hemmed in, under constant artillery attack and awaiting defeat, so the Americans feared a final desperate *banzai* attack.⁹¹ Useem knew he was in a dangerous location and in the light of continual rumours of Japanese incursions he had to "arrange how we were to evacuate in case we were overrun".⁹²

Discussion with the Islanders through an Army interpreter revealed that there were still as many as ninety people hiding in the caves.⁹³ Three men volunteered to return there and convince the others that it was safe to come out.⁹⁴ However, they were

afraid that the Japanese might become angry at them if the Americans told about the natives coming out, so the alert intelligence officer assured them that the Americans would not tell because they were not "on speaking terms with the Japanese". At 1800 the three natives were released in the area in which they had surrendered.⁹⁵

⁸⁹John Useem.

⁹⁰Mahoney had trained in a Japanese Language Training programme in Boulder, Colorado. He later trained as a social psychologist. See John Useem.

⁹¹The 81st Wildcat Division Historical Committee, p.131. Also see Smith, *The Approach to the Philippines*..., pp. 527-529 for more detail about the state of Japanese resistance.

⁹²John Useem.

⁹³The 81st Wildcat Division Historical Committee, p. 127.

⁹⁴Smith, *The Approach to the Philippines*..., p. 529.

⁹⁵*Ibid.*

One of the three Islanders who volunteered for this task was Robert Eldukl.⁹⁶ He was very scared as he and two other men made their way back amongst the rocks to the place where the Palauans and the Japanese were still in hiding. Eldukl recalls that on their way they "met three Japanese soldiers...and they were asking us for food. So we said "We don't have any food".⁹⁷ The soldiers turned away and left them alone. After the encounter the three men felt more "at ease". Eldukl had feared that the Japanese might have seen him and the others escape to the Americans and he thought that they might have retaliated by harming the Palauans still in the caves. As the soldiers only asked for food, he was now "not so afraid", because he was confident that the others were safe for the moment. Yet he still felt a sense of urgency about contacting the people and hoped that he could explain to them why it was better that they leave the caves.

We moved into the cave and very secretly we told all the Palauans that "We have come to get you" and "We will try to escape from the caves and go and join the Americans".⁹⁸

They had brought a small amount of food to give to the people to help convince them of the advantages of coming out. Eldukl recalls that the Americans had offered to help get the Islanders out by bringing a ship close to the shore so that they could escape by sea. Eldukl and the others thought it was better that they came in their own way and their own time. They were afraid that the Japanese might see them moving out from the caves and start to shoot. The men even debated whether to talk to Mathias Akitaya's mother because, although she herself was "pure Palauan", she was married to a Japanese and therefore they could not guarantee that the information would not reach the soldiers.⁹⁹

⁹⁶The names of the other two men were not given.

⁹⁷Robert Eldukl.

⁹⁸Ibid.

⁹⁹Ibid.

During the night of 8 October the Americans were active on patrol and four Japanese were killed while attempting to collect water from Lake Salome.¹⁰⁰ Eldukl recalls that there seemed to be spotlights over the area, but the Americans had promised that there would be no shooting from the ships or bombing, in case the Palauans decided to come out in the night.¹⁰¹ The illumination was not particularly unusual. Navy support ships had often fired illuminating shells during the night to aid the actions of the soldiers.¹⁰² Yet that night some of the the Japanese officers wondered why the area was being lit up without accompanying artillery fire.¹⁰³

Mathias remembers when the three men came to tell them they must leave the next morning. Eldukl and the others, despite their fears, must have decided to notify all of the Islanders, because Mathias recalls that even a number of Japanese women were to accompany them. They had to escape early on the morning of the 9th, before the American bombardment was due to begin. Akitaya was only a little frightened, because he believed the men's story and knew it must be safer to come out than to remain in the cave.¹⁰⁴

As the sun rose the following morning, Eldukl and the other two men led the rest of the Islanders out of the caves to meet the Americans. Many were wounded or very ill and needed "extensive medical attention". They had to be taken directly to hospital. One man died on arrival. All were malnourished and dehydrated. They were taken by truck to Useem's camp on the east side of Lake Aztec.¹⁰⁵ A number of Useem's men were digging a hole for a latrine at the time the group arrived at the camp. Some of the Islanders looked at it with terror, believing that it could be their grave.¹⁰⁶ They had no

¹⁰⁰The 81st Wildcat Division Historical Committee, p. 127.

¹⁰¹Robert Eldukl.

¹⁰²The 81st Wildcat Division Historical Committee, pp. 117-118.

¹⁰³Robert Eldukl's memory of Japanese reactions.

¹⁰⁴Mathias Akitaya.

¹⁰⁵Robert Eldukl, The 81st Wildcat Division Historical Committee, p. 127 & Smith, p. 529.

¹⁰⁶Lt. John Useem USNR, "The Changing Structure of a Micronesian Society" in *American Anthropologist* No. 47, 1945. p. 579.

experience of Americans and under stress could only recall the stories told to them by the Japanese.

Mathias' Japanese father was not told that the Palauans were surrendering to the Americans. He was convinced of the superiority of the Japanese and the family knew that if they told him they were going to the Americans he would refuse to come. As it was, when the old man saw the American soldiers, Mathias' older brother had to hold onto him to prevent him from returning to the cave. He had no choice but to proceed with them, so he "put his head down and was feeling very sorry for himself". Mathias himself felt confused and afraid - "I didn't know what to do, where to go. I didn't have a straight mind to notice or realize or recognize things or people".¹⁰⁷

The arrival of the second group of Islanders brought the total to 183. Useem and his men worked hard to settle the people in. Most of each day and night was "preoccupied with the sheer physical process of living". People were ill and dying, babies were born and there were occasional fights and disagreements between groups because of cramped and stressful conditions. There were supply shortages as no civil affairs material had been unloaded during the assault period.¹⁰⁸ Useem had to practise "moonlight requisition" wherever he could.¹⁰⁹ Such actions disturbed his supply officer, who had "come out of Business and wanted to run things businesslike", but under the circumstances Useem had no choice but to use any means he could to ensure the comfort and safety of the Islanders.¹¹⁰ Food for the people was mainly made up from K rations¹¹¹ and Japanese stocks of rice that were found still useable. Clothing

¹⁰⁷Mathias Akitaya.

¹⁰⁸Richard, *Volume 1*..., p. 613.

¹⁰⁹"Moonlight requisition" is a military colloquialism for stealing.

¹¹⁰John Useem.

¹¹¹K rations consisted of "chunk meat, such as chicken or pork, a fruit bar, a chocolate bar, a caramel bar, toilet paper, lemonade powder...and salt tablets...biscuits and the unknown brand of cigarettes". See Geoffrey Perret, *There's a War to be Won: The United States Army in World War II*. (Random House, New York, 1991) p. 301.

consisted of a mixture of any pieces of American and Japanese uniforms that could be secured.¹¹²

On 16 October the group in the civilian compound was joined by another fifteen Islanders, seven men, five women and three children, found by American forces on the small islands north of Peleliu. These people were originally from Sonsorol Island, southwest of Palau. They were brought to Angaur by staff of the Island Commander at Peleliu.¹¹³ More tents had been constructed, but the increased number of people meant that as many as twenty had to be sheltered in pyramid tents that should only have housed eight. Others were squeezed into crudely built shacks.¹¹⁴

The Islanders, emerging from a month of darkness and starvation, did not notice any lack of supplies. For Masao Guiliberte, like many others, there was a stark contrast between the deprivation they had suffered and the large amounts of food and clothing the Americans offered. He recalled that "it seemed like we were experiencing something like heaven".¹¹⁵ Food was issued to them in small amounts at first and the people were warned that after being hungry for so long they should take great care about how much they ate. Robert Eldukl remembers that one man died as a result of eating too much, too soon.¹¹⁶

The tents for the Islanders were enclosed within a fence and for Mathias and his family,

life actually began within those fences...we had good food, soldiers' food, American food and good water to drink for the first time in a long while.¹¹⁷

¹¹²Lt. John Useem USNR, "Governing the Occupied Areas of the South Pacific : Wartime Lessons and Peacetime Proposals" in *Applied Anthropology*, Volume 4, No. 3, Summer 1945. p. 6.

¹¹³Headquarters, Army Garrison Force - *Unit Report Number III*, 31 October 1944, p. 6. (RG 313, Box 7686, Folder : A9-5 Semi-Monthly)

¹¹⁴Lt. John Useem, "The American Pattern of Military Government in Micronesia" in *The American Journal of Sociology*, Volume LI, No.2, September 1945. p. 93.

¹¹⁵Masao Guiliberte.

¹¹⁶Robert Eldukl.

¹¹⁷Mathias Akitaya.

Japanese prisoners of war were put in a separate compound nearby, but Mathias' father and other Japanese civilians were allowed to stay with the Islanders.¹¹⁸ Masao remembered that almost all the captured Japanese soldiers were wounded.¹¹⁹

Fighting on Angaur continued until 23 October. Major Goto, the commander of the Angaur Sector Unit, was killed on the night of the 19th as the remnants of the Japanese forces tried to escape through American lines to the sea. From this, the Americans knew that the end of combat was approaching.¹²⁰

For the Islanders, life had barely begun. During the first few days after their arrival they slept and ate and gradually began to realize that they were safe. What concerned Mathias most was "being safe within that fence".¹²¹ It was difficult to accept that there was no need to be afraid. They were being fed, sheltered and clothed by the Americans and were much further away from the combat area than they had been.¹²² Useem could see clearly the extreme exhaustion of the people. For a long time, most were not required to do anything. Only one small group of the healthier women were put in charge of food preparation.¹²³ The others rested, sometimes sleeping, sometimes sitting quietly and talking. There were a number of children in the group, but there was "practically no movement, no running about".¹²⁴

The calm of some of the people masked extreme stress and confusion. The ordeal was not yet completely over and the effects of the violence of the war were to be long lasting. Useem had been very careful with security. He had guards at security posts, day and night.¹²⁵ The detachment of military police for Angaur originally

¹¹⁸Ibid.

¹¹⁹Masao Guiliberte.

¹²⁰The 81st Wildcat Division Historical Committee, p. 131.

¹²¹Mathias Akitaya.

¹²²John Useem.

¹²³Headquarters, Army Garrison Force - *Unit Report Number III*, 31 October 1944, p. 6.

¹²⁴Useem, "Changing Structure...", p. 580.

¹²⁵John Useem.

consisted of 50 men and one officer.¹²⁶ Of these 12 were assigned to guard the civilian compound and another 2 were posted at the civilian hospital ward. The rest were responsible for beach, supply depot and airfield security.¹²⁷ Mathias recalls that military police watched over them constantly and if anyone went anywhere the guards had to accompany them.¹²⁸ The police would always go out with the women when they went to collect taro, to ensure that they would be safe, both from the Japanese and from American soldiers who might mistake them for the enemy. There was also some concern about the possibility of rape.¹²⁹ Most Islanders however, due to illness, exhaustion and fear had little interest in moving beyond the confines of the camp.¹³⁰ At night the area was completely blacked out and the perimeter of security was established.¹³¹

One evening, not long after the arrival of the second group, there was a very heavy rain shower. Useem had retired for the night. He was aware of the emotional strain most of the people were under, but could not know where it might lead. The horrors of the month in the cave, fear of the Japanese, fear of the Americans, confusion at the suddenly changed circumstances, the continuing noise and activity of combat all combined and were too much for one man to cope with. He reached his breaking point. In a crazed state he grabbed an adze and first attacked several Palauans before "lurching out into the perimeters of the camp" and killing three of Useem's men, breaking their skulls. At this point Useem was awakened by shouts. People were yelling "Japanese! Japanese!" and Useem leapt up. His immediate assumption was that the camp had been invaded.

So in this pitch black, heavy rain, no knowledge, no language capacity, with great turmoil and confusion, everyone extremely frightened, I had to figure out what was going on. It took me until

¹²⁶Headquarters, Army Garrison Force - *Unit Report Number III*, 31 October 1944, p. 6.

¹²⁷Ibid.

¹²⁸Mathias Akitaya.

¹²⁹Masao Guiliberte.

¹³⁰Useem, "Governing the Occupied Areas...", p. 6.

¹³¹John Useem.

around six in the morning to learn and by then I was covered in blood and so were some of my men and my language officer had fainted in the fright...and so I had to work whatever way I could.¹³²

Useem knew that he had to get the situation under control or there would be trouble from the military command. If word was circulated about this incident, GIs might begin to see the Islanders as a threat, and he believed that could cause "panic" among the American troops. Useem revived Mahoney and together they slowly tried to establish what had happened.

Over two or three hours I calmed down the people and got them to the point where they had some degree of security, although children were crying and they were frightened.¹³³

Robert Eldukl remembered that night. The man who had "gone crazy" was shot during his rampage, and the Palauans were very afraid that the Americans "might kill the Palauans because of this incident". They knew that soldiers had been killed and wounded, and they had no understanding of how American justice worked. They expected some kind of retaliation from the Americans. Some people began to "develop some bad feelings towards the family of the man because of the incident". He recalls that the Islanders planned to punish the family "but Mahoney and Useem, the commanding officers, were able to convince them and try to talk them out of it".¹³⁴

In the early light of the following morning Useem had a delegation of the man's family come to see him. They fell to the ground and said to him "We are ready to die". Through his interpreter he asked them why they wished to die. They explained that

"Our family has been destroyed, our household has been disgraced. Our clan no longer has a name, so please kill us, whatever way you wish. We don't know how you kill in America".¹³⁵

¹³²Ibid.

¹³³Ibid.

¹³⁴Robert Eldukl.

¹³⁵John Useem.

Useem was astounded but answered as calmly as he could, "I am an American and I am not going to kill you". The people remained prostrated. They began to kiss his feet and beg him to kill them.¹³⁶

Useem was very distressed and had to take some time to think about what he could do. After an hour he told the Islanders that he would not kill them. They said to him that "We are not persons". He had no knowledge of Palauan culture, but they told him this and he believed them. He agonised over a solution and finally went over to the airfield ¹³⁷ and asked whether there were any flights going to Saipan and whether it would be possible for them to take a number of Islanders out of Angaur. The transfer was arranged and so Useem, using logic and his mediating skills, was able to solve what would have been an almost impossible situation.¹³⁸ Robert Eldukl remembered it was explained to the people that the man had been mentally ill and that was the reason he had acted the way he did. Eldukl was aware that Useem had taken control of the situation and had "talked them out" of wanting punishment for the family.¹³⁹

This incident was by far the most critical Useem encountered, but there were other problems. One young man died as a result of developing blood poisoning from his wounds. His family wished to hold a funeral for him. They told Useem through his interpreter that they wanted to place him in a boat and send it out to sea. Useem knew that this was impossible under combat conditions. There were ships patrolling around the island and they were still firing their weapons into the last Japanese stronghold in the north of Angaur. He could not allow them to risk their lives in this way, so he suggested to them that it would be better if they could bury him on the shore. They agreed and asked him whether they could proceed with the funeral

¹³⁶John Useem. In recounting this story to me 46 years after the event, Useem was clearly still distressed by the role the Islanders asked him to play. He broke down twice while describing the events of that morning.

¹³⁷Construction of the airfield had begun as early as 23 September, not long after Angaur was declared officially secured on 20 September. It was ready for use on 15 October so that places the date of this incident about a week after the second group of Islanders emerged from the caves. See The 81st Wildcat Division Historical Committee, p. 219.

¹³⁸Useem concluded the story "I never saw them [the family] for a couple of years, but they came back [to Palau] and they had no name, and so the community of Palauan chiefs gave them my name".

¹³⁹Robert Eldukl.

ceremony Useem saw no reason why they could not, so advised them to do what they needed to do. He was shocked to discover that

the ceremony consisted of everybody lining up and walking around the whole island, through the combat zone. And suddenly I got word from the commanding officer [to] "Get those people out of the combat zone." I said "I'll try sir" and he sent word "You do it". But in the meantime the Japanese had stopped firing and the Americans had stopped firing as these people were singing and crying..in this bereavement and I couldn't stop them.¹⁴⁰

When the ceremony had finished and Useem had dealt with the wrath of his commander, conditions returned to "normal".¹⁴¹

The military government training, which Useem had received at Columbia University was valuable in that it helped him to decide how to deal with such situations. It gave him the capacity to organize himself and others, evaluate the situation, make judgements and act upon them. He developed these skills during the programme, but he learned very little about the culture of the area.¹⁴² Although an anthropologist himself¹⁴³, he had almost no knowledge of traditional Palauan society or more importantly, of contemporary Palauan life under Japanese administration. There was very little written material to which he could refer. All that was available to him was a Civil Affairs Handbook on the Western Carolines area, prepared by the Navy Department, which consisted mainly of brief descriptions and statistical information.¹⁴⁴ Useem felt he gained little from it. At Columbia, the men chosen for military government training

¹⁴⁰John Useem.

¹⁴¹Ibid.

¹⁴²In a discussion of the Navy's course in military government, Richard points out that the area and language study components focussed on the Far East. "Comparatively little attention was given to the Mandated Islands". Richard, *Volume. I...*, p. 63.

¹⁴³Useem had trained in sociology and anthropology at Harvard University and the University of Wisconsin and among other work, had completed studies of culture and change among American Indians. From John Useem, *Curriculum Vitae* (1987).

¹⁴⁴ Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, *Civil Affairs Handbook : West Caroline Islands*. In an article written in 1945, on his return from the field, Useem refers to the other texts he had read at the time which were 'misleading' in terms of the contemporary way of life of Palauans. See "Changing Structure...", p. 580n.

were all civilians who knew zero about anything military and they were teaching us how to be officers within a system with its own rules...So we had to be trained to think and act not as anthropologists, historians or businessmen, but as junior officers, and we were totally green and that was a very important part of it...I felt confident I knew my job, though the content of the job was totally strange to me.¹⁴⁵

It was during events like the funeral that Useem's training and his personal abilities were put to the test.

Even daily communication was extremely difficult. It led to many problems and filled much of the days. Useem relied heavily on Mahoney. Mahoney's understanding of Japanese was limited, so for Useem, everyday communication was

an agonising, long process in which I would express something and it would go to him [Mahoney] and he would try to figure it out and then it would go to somebody who knew Japanese and maybe they would respond, but often there was a question of "Who are you talking to?" so it would take a long, long process going in both directions.¹⁴⁶

Useem soon found that after he had asked a question and Mahoney had set to work to get an answer, he could play a game of chess while he waited. He would return later, get the answer, ask a follow up question and as Mahoney went back to work he would go back to the chess board. As time progressed and Useem was able to establish which Islanders seemed to hold positions of authority for each group - Palauans, Chamorros, Ulithians, Yapese - he arranged for afternoon meetings with these people.¹⁴⁷ During these sessions, with the aid of Mahoney, he would discuss whatever the people wished to discuss.¹⁴⁸ They would then report any decisions, orders and other information back to the rest of the inhabitants of the camp.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁵John Useem. The Navy's programme at Columbia was criticized by some graduates as being "abstract theory rather than the practical aspects of the job". Richard, p. 63. Others believed it prepared them well because "the school created a corps of officers who had lived Military Government/Civil Affairs problems for months and developed a sense of their importance which probably would not have been obtained otherwise". Dr. John L. Taylor in Richard, p. 67. See Richard, *Volume 1...*, pp. 62-67 for further evaluation of the Military Government Programme.

¹⁴⁶John Useem.

¹⁴⁷Headquarters, Army Garrison Force - *Unit Report Number III*, 31 October 1944, p. 7 mentions this "regular meeting of the chiefs". See also Richard, *Volume 1...*, p. 628.

¹⁴⁸John Useem.

¹⁴⁹Richard, *Volume 1...*, p. 628.

Useem rarely addressed all the Islanders and he had far fewer everyday conversations than his men. The enlisted men worked more closely with the Islanders on a daily basis. As the health of the people improved, some began to work with the Americans, mainly cleaning up debris and doing limited construction work.¹⁵⁰ By 24 October, only 16 days after their arrival in camp, 40 Islanders were employed to work with civil affairs enlisted men clearing a new site for the establishment of more permanent living facilities.¹⁵¹ For these enlisted men and Islanders, segregation was minimal. As they spent a lot of work time together, they developed ways to communicate via sign language and hand gestures and, as time passed, through a mix of basic English and basic Palauan. Useem would hear Islanders calling out "Hey Joe" and Americans trying "to figure out how to call the Palauans!"¹⁵² Many of the American men were young, between 18 and their early 20s, from working-class families and mid-western towns. Useem concluded that these men were very effective communicators. They had enough "street smarts" to cope with all types of occurrences and they coupled this with a "sense of sympathetic understanding".¹⁵³ The "genuine naivete" and "utter lack of arrogance" of many of the men encouraged a "friendly response" from the Islanders.¹⁵⁴ However Useem still had to monitor relations between the men and the Islanders in order to avoid problems. He laid down rules to be followed strictly, such as, "No man dare put his hand on any woman", but even a clear order like that was open to questioning by the men. One asked whether that meant he could not help the women climb up onto the truck. Useem realized he had to be consistent, so he stated that the women would have to make their own way up onto the truck. He was "continuously negotiating" at the same time as he was learning the best ways to handle issues himself.¹⁵⁵ As he began to understand elements of the Palauans'

¹⁵⁰Mathias Akitaya.

¹⁵¹Headquarters, Army Garrison Force - *Unit Report Number III*, 31 October 1944, p. 7.

¹⁵²John Useem.

¹⁵³Ibid. & Useem, "Changing Structure...", p. 580.

¹⁵⁴Useem, "Changing Structure...", p. 580.

¹⁵⁵John Useem.

way of life, he began to share his findings with his men. Some were unconcerned, others were full of curiosity. For Useem and his men Angaur was a strange new place on the other side of the world and their contact with its people revealed another side to the American-Japanese war.

Many of his men

were for the first time out of the United States...newcomers, so everything had a certain novelty, along with all the excitement and the nervousness...we were discovering a new world so there was a great deal of interest in all the men to sit down and talk with Palauans and ask elementary things - how do you raise a kid? or what do you eat? - which gave them a feeling of commonality and gave them some meaningful relationship and that went on all day long...and there was also a feeling that they were not just involved in a shooting war but that they were involved in actually dealing with people who were in trouble and they felt good about that.¹⁵⁶

For Useem the task of controlling relations between "young adult males ten thousand miles from home" and female Islanders was a "massive thing". He became very troubled when one of the men proudly claimed the reputation of having "made the first lay" with a woman. He could not gauge whether or not it was true, but he threatened the man with court-martial. However, Useem was genuinely impressed with the majority of his men and the gentleness and sympathy with which they dealt with Islanders. They "were enthusiastic about what they could do and they especially reached out for the children" and their relationships with them were "immediately very warm".¹⁵⁷

For the Palauans life was simple and complex at the same time. Food and shelter was abundant and daily life was safer than it had been for many months. However, it was some time before the Islanders could put aside their fear of the Americans and of what their future was to be. Useem recalls that many people had brought a small number of "precious possessions" with them when they came out of the caves. One person had a crucifix, another some of his grandparents' clothing and these became

¹⁵⁶Ibid.

¹⁵⁷Ibid.

"their private property", which they hung onto tightly.¹⁵⁸ It was all they had left of their old life.

Communication was still inadequate and people often did not know what was expected of them. They did not know how to act or react. Useem recalled that when people first started to work

it was soon necessary to tell them to slow down for they worked as fast and as hard as humanly possible. Thus when unloading sand from a truck they would try to make the floor immaculate, brushing off all the loose particles with their hands.¹⁵⁹

Useem was struck by the desperate desire of these people

to be helpful [because] it reflected on their part something that was very important. They were trying to please us because they were still very frightened and we in turn were trying to make them feel secure and to see these men [in the truck], I was very touched.¹⁶⁰

A mixture of fear of American authority and gratitude for their treatment so far made Palauans work hard to do the right thing by the Americans. They also refused payment for most of the work they did. At the regular meeting of the leaders of the various Islander groups, the men came to an agreement.

Since they are being fed and housed by us [the American forces], and supplied with materials of construction, they declined with thanks the offer of pay for work done in the Civilian Compound or at the site of the proposed native village...They will accept pay, however, for personal services such as laundry, and for work done that is not primarily for their own benefit.¹⁶¹

Robert Eldukl laboured for the soldiers, at first clearing ground for more tents to be erected. He recalls being paid a small wage¹⁶², "but money, we didn't really need the money, because clothes and food were given free". He felt that the soldiers were

¹⁵⁸Ibid.

¹⁵⁹John Useem, "Changing Structure...", p. 579.

¹⁶⁰John Useem.

¹⁶¹Headquarters, Army Garrison Force - *Unit Report Number III*, 31 October 1944, p. 7

¹⁶²This may have been later on when wages were paid. See Headquarters, Army Garrison Force, Angaur, *Military Government - April Monthly Report on*, 5 May 1945, p. 2 (RG 38, Box 38) for listing of amount of wages paid that month.

"generally good to us".¹⁶³ There were some restrictions on Islanders, including ones involving their association with the captured Japanese. It was clear that the Americans did not want the Islanders to talk to the Japanese and they also prevented the prisoners, even the civilian Japanese, from communicating with the Islanders.¹⁶⁴ Useem realized that many of the Japanese prisoners "deeply resented the enthusiastic response" some of the Islanders began to show towards Americans who had given them safety and shelter. He was aware of threats of retaliation that some Japanese had made. Such problems made interaction strained and best avoided.¹⁶⁵

Sister Elene was grateful for the kind treatment she received from the Americans, but she could not forget that she also cared for the Japanese. To her, at that time, they were still "family". The first time she saw a Japanese plane shot down by the American forces she was now with she was very upset. She had seen planes flying over before and when they started firing she had run to hide. This time she was able to watch, but as she saw the Japanese plane burst into flames, she began to cry.¹⁶⁶ This incident probably took place in the early hours of 13 October when Japanese aircraft appeared over Angaur and dropped four bombs before being intercepted by American fighters.¹⁶⁷

Most of the Islanders had been out of the caves for just over two weeks when on 23 October all Japanese resistance on Angaur was declared overcome. During those weeks, the exhausting fighting had continued for the men of the 81st as they cleared out the last pockets of Japanese resistance. They clambered over sharp coral and rock outcrops, struggled through airless tunnels and holes, burning under the fierce tropical sun, awaiting bursts of machine gun fire from the increasingly desperate Japanese.¹⁶⁸ On 22 October, the last seven Islanders still in hiding were taken into American hands.

¹⁶³Robert Eldukl.

¹⁶⁴Ibid.

¹⁶⁵Useem, "Governing the Occupied Areas...", p. 6.

¹⁶⁶Sister Elene Ebud.

¹⁶⁷See *War Diary Marine Aircraft Group 11*, 13 October 1944.

¹⁶⁸The 81st Wildcat Division Historical Committee, p. 128 & 132, & Smith, pp. 529-530.

This last group was made up of a single woman and her six children. Their Japanese husband and father had been killed in action after being drafted into the Army on Angaur.¹⁶⁹

By 23 October, when it was established that only a very few isolated stragglers were left of the Japanese Angaur Sector Unit, the human costs of the battle could be totalled. Between 17 September and 23 October 1,338 Japanese were killed and 59 were taken prisoner.¹⁷⁰ After Masao Guiliberte came out from the caves, he was shocked when he looked across from his tent to the compound in which the Japanese soldiers were held. Of all the soldiers he had known were defending Angaur, there seemed to be only about 30 prisoners.¹⁷¹ American casualties were 264 killed and 1,355 wounded plus nearly one thousand cases of sickness, disease and battle fatigue.¹⁷²

The Americans had fought hard to secure Angaur, and work on the airfield, which had begun only days after the initial landing, was accelerated during October. The invasion had been planned to obtain an air base from which missions could be flown to support the Philippines operation and to neutralize the other bypassed islands in the Palau area.¹⁷³ There had been no useful Japanese airstrip on the island, so construction had to begin with the slow and laborious task of clearing jungle, filling in swamps and levelling ground. Even before 23 October, engineer aviation battalions had completed two 6,000 foot runways and had begun work on storage and other installations.¹⁷⁴

¹⁶⁹Headquarters, Army Garrison Force - *Unit Report Number III*, 31 October 1944, p. 7.

¹⁷⁰The 81st Wildcat Division Historical Committee, p. 133.

¹⁷¹Masao Guiliberte.

¹⁷²Smith, p. 530. Also see The 81st Wildcat Division Historical Committee, p. 132 which lists final casualties from 17 September to 23 October as 196 killed and 1,480 wounded. The higher number of deaths and lower number of wounded in Smith's official history results in part from the adjustment of the later figures to include those men initially listed as wounded who later died as a result of their injuries.

¹⁷³The 81st Wildcat Division Historical Committee, p. 219.

¹⁷⁴Smith, p. 530.

As the end of all resistance approached there was much more time for the soldiers of the Wildcat Division to relax. They became less involved in fighting and more concerned with improving living conditions, as well as observing and assisting with the development of the base. Others became intrigued with the "natives", watching them settle in and go about rebuilding their lives.¹⁷⁵ In this Useem found an answer to some of his supply problems. He discovered quickly that many of the soldiers were very curious to see the Islanders. He began to make deals with them, allowing them a brief tour through the camp on the proviso that they provide something in return - flour, gasoline, whatever Useem needed that they had. This worked well for a while, but became very time consuming, so Useem came to the conclusion that the best answer was for him to organize a show:

so I asked people how many of them could dance or half dance...or sing or half sing and we invited everybody from the American zone who wasn't on the firing line to come and see and we had several thousands of people and we put on this pseudo show in return for which we made arrangements for all sorts of equipment and supplies.¹⁷⁶

The show was very popular and another followed later. They were successful for Useem and for the spectators, and were described in the Divisional history as "unforgettable".¹⁷⁷

The camp remained the centre of life for both the Islanders and Useem's unit. While the battle continued conditions were difficult, cramped and inadequate, but there was no alternative, because the village had been destroyed and the people had to be confined to one area for their safety. With the end of hostilities, improvements could be made and eventually the camp shifted south to a new location.¹⁷⁸ Islanders had been working on clearing this site for a number of weeks and in late November it was complete and people moved into the new village of *Be-es-el-Belu*, meaning 'native

¹⁷⁵The 81st Wildcat Division Historical Committee, pp. 219 & 224.

¹⁷⁶John Useem Interview.

¹⁷⁷The 81st Wildcat Division Historical Committee, p. 229.

¹⁷⁸Useem, "Governing the Occupied Areas...", p. 6 and John Useem.

village'.¹⁷⁹ It consisted of 42 tents around a central kitchen area. The American flag was raised over the village on 3 December 1944 by the Island Commander Colonel Ray A. Dunn.¹⁸⁰ Eradromel, the representative for the Angaurese people, delivered "a flowery speech" of thanks in Japanese.¹⁸¹

Although the Military Government Section was entirely responsible for the welfare of the Islanders, some of the soldiers of the 81st were assigned to assist with rebuilding such village structures as churches and establishing cemeteries.¹⁸² Sister Elene remembered advising the soldiers on how to renovate the existing church which had been badly damaged in the bombing and fighting.¹⁸³ It was difficult to communicate, but she was able to explain in Japanese that she wanted a gate built around it and she was impressed at "the kindness of the soldiers" as they built the gate for her and repainted the church.¹⁸⁴

There were, however, misunderstandings. One day she was called to the office and asked to accompany the soldiers to the new village area where they had laid out a cemetery for the Japanese. She was very shocked to see the huge number of graves of Japanese soldiers who had been killed defending Angaur. She became even more confused when she saw that the Americans had built a house right in the middle of the cemetery. It seemed to her a very strange thing to do as it was not a custom followed by the Japanese or the Palauan Christians.¹⁸⁵

¹⁷⁹Richard, *Volume 1...*, p. 627.

¹⁸⁰*Ibid.* pp. 627-628.

¹⁸¹The 81st Wildcat Division Historical Committee, pp. 229-230.

¹⁸²*Ibid.* p. 219.

¹⁸³"The native Catholic church destroyed by military operations was rebuilt by the armed forces and presented to the native community by the Island Commander at the dedication ceremony on 3 June 1945". Headquarters, Army Garrison Force, Angaur - *Military Government Report for June, Part 1 (Angaur)*, 5 July 1945, p. 2. (RG 38, Box 38).

¹⁸⁴Sister Elene Ebud.

¹⁸⁵*Ibid.* The "house" was probably a chapel or church with the cemetery established around it as in western Christian custom.

Many Americans were surprised that most of the Islanders were Christians.¹⁸⁶ They had no idea of the way of life of the Palauans and most carried around with them the stereotype of the primitive Pacific Island native. Many of the supplies Useem was issued with were suited to this kind of population. There was no understanding amongst planners and soldiers that the Islanders were acculturated into a fairly modernised Japanese way of life. Useem soon realised that the supplies he needed were closer to those that would be required for a "South Dakota rural community" rather than a primitive village.¹⁸⁷ A number of the soldiers were bewildered when they were asked by Palauans if they had ever heard of or played 'Ping Pong'. When the Americans laughed in puzzlement, the Palauans explained through the interpreter that it was a great game and they would teach them about it!¹⁸⁸ On both sides, there was a lack of any frame of reference for understanding the other culture. The Palauans only knew what the Japanese had told them, the ordinary American soldiers knew next to nothing and even Useem had only a limited understanding of the people, gleaned from outdated books. Yet all developed ways of working around these obstacles.

Sister Elene was surprised to see the American chaplain wearing trousers, because the priests she knew had always worn a soutane. Still he wore a cross and the first mass he delivered for the Islanders on October 22 was recognisable.¹⁸⁹ The services for the Islanders were separate from those for the soldiers. After the first large gathering, the priest came to the tents every Friday to give a mass. To work around the barriers of language, the priest developed a unique system for confession. The possible sins were listed in Japanese and later Palauan with numbers next to them; the person would point and the chaplain could tell from the number what each was confessing.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁶The 81st Wildcat Division Historical Committee, p. 229.

¹⁸⁷John Useem & Useem, "Changing Society...", p. 580.

¹⁸⁸John Useem.

¹⁸⁹Sister Elene Ebud remembers the date of this first mass and she has a photograph of the service labelled "(1610-10-22-44) Catholic Services for Natives" - i.e. 4:10 pm on 22 October 1944.

¹⁹⁰Sister Elene Ebud.

Lieutenant Mahoney and a naval enlisted man named William Plunkert, set up classes to teach basic English to the Islanders. Plunkert became responsible for arranging schooling for the children and he initially asked Useem what he should teach them. Useem had little idea himself so replied "just try what you can". So Plunkert

set up this school with different ages and he began to teach a little bit about English and a little bit about America and whatever else and he was a marvellous teacher and they loved him.¹⁹¹

Mahoney organized language classes for the adults and a small number of people began to attend.¹⁹² Masao Guiliberte, who started work as an assistant to the hospital corpsmen, went to these classes at night to learn some English. Gradually he became proficient enough to act as a translator.¹⁹³ Some of the older people recognized the western alphabet as they had learnt it during German times. Sister Elene had learned to say it by listening to her parents, and when Mahoney tried to teach her to say A, B, C she could not understand and responded with the German pronunciation- Ah, Beh, Ceh.¹⁹⁴

Useem and Plunkert later chose a number of Islanders to be teaching assistants. They looked for people who showed an interest in children and could communicate in a basic way with Americans. They decided they needed people who were "lively and had some enthusiasm and readiness and weren't frightened". Useem admits he really "didn't know what kind of Palauan should be a teacher". One of the women he and Plunkert selected turned out to be a prostitute! However she also became a "very good teacher". Choosing people to take on different roles and jobs or to act as spokespersons for the Islanders was a difficult task and Useem found his decisions were mostly based "on guesswork or intuition...and we finally learned a little as we went along, but we were innocents. We were newcomers in a new world".¹⁹⁵

¹⁹¹John Useem.

¹⁹²Ibid.

¹⁹³Masao Guiliberte.

¹⁹⁴Sister Elene Ebud.

¹⁹⁵John Useem.



It was an even stranger new world for Islanders but gradually they started to adapt to conditions in the camp. Those people whose health had improved began to work at various tasks. As early as the end of October, 15 women and 2 men were involved in food preparation.¹⁹⁶ They learned new ways to cook in makeshift ovens, made out of drums with the tops cut off.¹⁹⁷ Other men were employed in the hospital dispensary, assisting medical personnel, or became labourers on construction projects.¹⁹⁸ Women assisted with children and some worked in an "experimental laundry". Using "crude equipment, they washed and finished 163 pieces for 16 men in 1 week".¹⁹⁹

Life was turned upside down. Robert Eldukl, who only months earlier had worked for Japanese soldiers, was now employed by the American military. He learned to drive a truck which was used to load war debris and other rubbish that littered the island. He laboured mainly with a team of Black soldiers.²⁰⁰ Most Palauans were very surprised to see Black Americans. Sister Elene was disconcerted by the men who were

completely black and silk-like...And we say "Those people, those Black soldiers - are they American?" We are surprised to see them because we are also black but they are very dark, more than ourselves.²⁰¹

Masao Guiliberte remembers being both "anxious and curious" about Black troops.²⁰² Robert Eldukl, who worked alongside these men, found that it was not long before his work situation was changed, because "the white officers didn't like us to go with the Black Americans". Eldukl became aware that the white Americans preferred that the Palauans did not associate with Black soldiers at all. He reasoned from the inferior

¹⁹⁶Headquarters, Army Garrison Force - *Unit Report Number III*, 31 October 1944, p. 7.

¹⁹⁷Ibid & Masao Guiliberte.

¹⁹⁸Masao Guiliberte.

¹⁹⁹Headquarters, Army Garrison Force - *Unit Report Number III*, 31 October 1944, p. 7.

²⁰⁰Robert Eldukl.

²⁰¹Sister Elene.

²⁰²Masao Guiliberte.

positions and jobs held by these soldiers that American officers thought, "if we went with the Black Americans we would not be able to do so much work and we wouldn't be able to learn much".²⁰³

Useem realized that some Americans disliked Islanders associating with Black soldiers and a few warned them that Blacks "were the lowest class of people in America" and that they were lowering themselves by spending time with such soldiers. Ironically, others warned Useem, after seeing him riding in a jeep with a group of Islanders, that *he* should not lower his standards and "suggested that natives should be permitted to ride only with enlisted men."²⁰⁴

On the whole Useem found his men were not condescending towards Islanders. Many were quite protective. This was shown clearly once the airstrip was completed and air force planes and personnel began to arrive.²⁰⁵ When these "outsiders" came near the camp, Useem's men "were very sure that they did not molest or mess around [with the Islanders] and they took great pride in their individual work".²⁰⁶

Contact between Islanders and Americans increased as time passed. Masao recalls that a number of soldiers who could play musical instruments put together a "sort of band" and they would sometimes come around to the Palauan tents to entertain them.²⁰⁷ Film screenings, however, became the major catalyst of social contact. Picture theatres were already established when the Islanders emerged from the caves. For a short time screenings were suspended because of the danger of Japanese attack, but they began again after 23 October and were only interrupted by machinery faults caused by the relentlessly damp and humid weather.²⁰⁸

²⁰³Robert Eldukl.

²⁰⁴John Useem, "Americans as Governors of Natives in the Pacific" in *The Journal of Social Issues*, August 1946. p. 43.

²⁰⁵The first runway was ready for use on 15 October and a C-47 arrived the next day. See The 81st Wildcat Division Historical Committee, p. 219.

²⁰⁶John Useem.

²⁰⁷Masao Guiliberte.

²⁰⁸The 81st Wildcat Division Historical Committee, p. 228.

The first few times Robert Eldukl saw movies, only men were admitted and the site was guarded by military police. The presence of the police seemed to limit mingling between the American soldiers and the civilians. Eldukl remembers mainly Westerns, but as he could not understand the dialogue he thought that, compared to Japanese movies, the American ones were "stupid".²⁰⁹ Mathias also attended the movie theatre but never associated much with the Americans there.²¹⁰ The main contact he had with soldiers was through working and later playing sport. Both he and Eldukl played baseball with the Americans. Mathias was part of a team called the Comets and he often took part in games with the soldiers with whom he laboured. Eldukl remembers playing mainly against the officers because the enlisted men's team was too good.²¹¹ The men who worked with the soldiers found them mostly friendly and approachable. They saw that the Americans were serious about the work to be done and expected the Islanders to follow orders, but they were easy to deal with. They would often stop for a joke or a bit of fun. This contrasted strongly with the Japanese. If an order from a Japanese was disobeyed there would be punishment and usually a beating.²¹²

Conditions improved greatly for the Islanders within weeks of the end of hostilities on Angaur. However war debris and unexploded bombs meant that even the area around the camp could still be dangerous. Sister Elene discovered this for herself while making handicrafts to sell to the soldiers. In order to obtain material to weave mats, the soldiers took Palauans over to a nearby island, as Angaur was now almost completely devoid of vegetation. On the first occasion Elene had collected leaves and cut them, she built a fire to prepare them by boiling them in water. Not long after she had started the fire, there was an explosion. A number of soldiers rushed over to see what had happened. They warned Elene that no-one should build a fire anywhere

²⁰⁹Robert Eldukl.

²¹⁰Mathias Akitaya.

²¹¹Mathias Akitaya & Robert Eldukl.

²¹²Robert Eldukl.

without first consulting them, because there was still live ammunition scattered everywhere. She was told she was very lucky not to be hurt.²¹³

Once Islanders had moved to the new village site some of these problems were reduced and life became more stable. However Useem was aware that most people still feared for their future. They also knew that although they had passed through the battle over their island, and were now at relative peace, their families and friends on Babeldaob and Koror were still in the midst of war.

In December 1944 a group of Islanders, mainly Chamorros, managed to flee from Babeldaob to Angaur.²¹⁴ They were very fearful of retribution from the Japanese if they were caught. Amongst the group was a Palauan man who had worked for the government during Japanese times, Jose Tellei (also known as Oikawasang). He became a great source of information for Useem on Palauan ways of life and his presence helped to make Useem feel more able to deal with many of the problems that faced him.²¹⁵ Oikawasang and the other Islanders from Babeldaob did not bring much comfort to the Palauans in Useem's camp. Instead they brought news of relatives and the immense suffering they were experiencing. The people on Angaur listened to descriptions of conditions on Babeldaob - the starvation, the bombings, and the brutality of some of the Japanese.²¹⁶ They learned of disease, malnutrition and death. They could do nothing except wait for the war to end and they had no way of knowing how long that would take. They had seen the destruction the war had wrought on Angaur. The land had been changed, turned inside out. Once green and lush it was now white and barren, except for scattered rubble, bits of metal and the bare trunks of shattered coconut palms. All the familiar landmarks were gone and no-one could locate the place where their homes had stood.²¹⁷ Mathias Akitaya understood the ways in

²¹³Sister Elene Ebud.

²¹⁴Ibid., & Useem. For Jose (Joseph) Tellei's story of his escape see WH Interview: 27 March 1985 in Higuchi, *Micronesians and the Pacific War : Interviews...*

²¹⁵John Useem.

²¹⁶See Richard, *Volume 1...*, p. 624.

²¹⁷Useem, "The American Pattern of Military Government...", p. 94.

which the people on Babeldaob must be suffering. He had taken refuge in the caves and had suffered the same fear and hunger. He knew that

when I came out from that same cave in Angaur I was not in Angaur anymore. I was somewhere else. It was not Angaur, not the one that I was on when I went inside the cave.²¹⁸

Now everyday heavy bombers took off from the airstrip on Angaur and fighter planes could be seen leaving Peleliu, heading north in the direction of the big island²¹⁹. What hope was there for Babeldaob?

*

When John Useem left Angaur in January 1945, he felt that the efforts of his military government team had only initiated "temporary measures" to deal with the immediate, desperate situation of the Islanders.²²⁰ They had "put clothes on their backs" and "food in their bellies". They had cared for the sick and wounded and thereby improved the general physical existence of the people. He also knew he had provided "a sense of security, but no future".

I couldn't say a thing about the future...By the time I left I felt they had a confidence in the integrity of the United States and what we had done. Their anxieties were still there, they didn't know what their future was - but they felt safe and secure and they felt that they ought to start thinking about the future, but they didn't know how to think about it.²²¹

Mathias finds it very hard to "pinpoint what was going on" during those months. He was young, only 17, and only thought of what would happen the next day.

²¹⁸Mathias Akitaya.

²¹⁹B-24 bombers left Angaur for missions in the Palaus and in the Philippines. See The 81st Wildcat Division Historical Committee, p. 219. The fighters on Peleliu were part of Marine Aircraft Group 11. See *War Diary MAG 11*.

²²⁰Useem, "Governing the Occupied Areas...", p. 10.

²²¹John Useem.

I was born into the Japanese time. I went along with what the Japanese had for me and then there came the American time so I went along and learned by it.²²²

He had to "go along" even when it became clear that the Japanese loss of the war was to have more personal ramifications. His father had to be repatriated to Japan with the rest of the Japanese civilians and the soldiers. Mathias never saw him again. Thus, the war took away his home and his family. The strongest force for Mathias at the time was the memory of what he had suffered during that month in the cave and the devastation that the war brought.²²³ Even in 1990 when talking of this experience Mathias became very distressed. His hatred of war is intense and his greatest desire is that his children understand the anguish the war caused, but that they never have to experience it themselves.²²⁴

Masao Guiliberte went into the cave certain of the superiority of the Japanese military. He believed the Japanese soldiers when they said that more forces would be coming to help with the fighting on Angaur. He did not question them when nothing came. He hoped the Japanese would win the war and that he could be a part of the triumph, yet he noticed, as time passed, that the "Japanese stopped talking to us and trying to convince us that they could win the war". Although he was completely involved in his own survival and that of the other people in his shelter, he began to realize that Japanese victory was very unlikely.²²⁵

Sister Elene put her trust in God. This gave her strength and she tried to pass this on to the people with whom she shared the cave. She loved the Japanese because of her thirty years with them, but it was her faith which gave her the courage to leave the shelter on 8 October and take her chances with the Americans.²²⁶

²²²Mathias Akitaya.

²²³Ibid.

²²⁴Ibid.

²²⁵Masao Guiliberte.

²²⁶Sister Elene Ebud.

Robert Eldukl had worked closely with the Japanese soldiers helping to prepare the defences of Angaur. Yet when he came out of the caves and first met the commanding officer of the American forces, he was immediately surprised by the difference between this high ranking officer and the Japanese commanders.

I didn't remember myself going close to a Japanese officer of that rank, but this one, the American commanding officer, he was able to joke with us and he was giving us biscuits to eat and after that I felt comfortable with Americans just after that first time I met them.²²⁷

For the Palauans on Angaur the force which shaped their lives and their actions was the unbearable suffering and deprivation of nearly 30 days in the caves. They had contact with the Japanese during that time, but their abiding concern was with their own survival. When the shelling became focussed on the Japanese stronghold in the north where the Palauans had taken refuge, the people knew that if they stayed where they were they would die. Exhaustion and desperation helped to dampen fear of the unknown, of the Americans, and they made the decision to turn themselves over to the 'enemy'.

Their immediate reactions to the Americans were also coloured by the experiences of the previous month. They came out from "hell" to "heaven" - food and safety. The Americans they met were friendly and caring. They looked after the sick and wounded and provided shelter. Palauans felt great relief and gratitude and were overwhelmed by the abundance of everything - food, equipment, people, movies, medical care.

On Angaur, Islanders did not turn against the Japanese. During the time in the cave the soldiers did not mistreat them. The Japanese were not the cause of their suffering, but shared it; all experienced the same deprivations. The Islanders' choice to leave the Japanese was a matter of survival. Once they were safe within the American compound, fed and clothed, they began to feel that the Americans were good people. They became loyal to them and willing to work hard to repay them for their kindness. Yet they did not lose their concern for the Japanese. The Palauans on Angaur felt

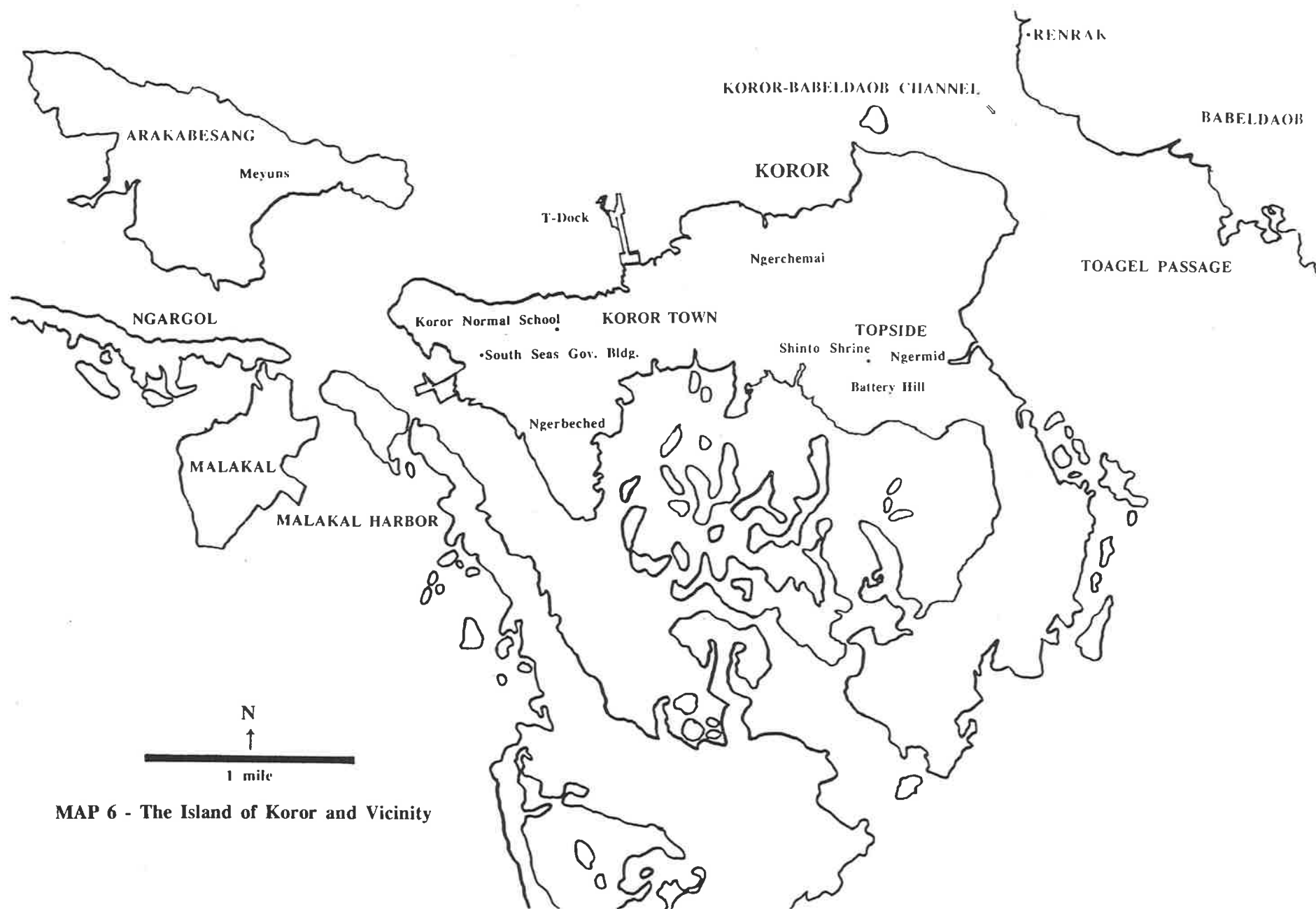
²²⁷Robert Eldukl.

connection with both sides, but stayed with the Americans because that was where life could begin again.

On Babeldaob, the situation was different. There was no invasion; the war unfolded as a prolonged air attack. Food sources were destroyed or used up and hunger became the greatest enemy. For those Islanders left on Babeldaob the war changed the land and devastated the people, just as it did on Angaur, but on the big island, the people's relations with the Japanese soldiers had far more influence on their survival. The severe shortage of food and competition for what was left caused a growing rift with the Japanese which began to shape Palauan attitudes toward the unknown Americans - Americans who were still only shadowy figures in the cockpits of planes. For Angaurese the war was intense, but the violence ceased for them in October 1944. For the Islanders trapped on Babeldaob, it seemed as if it would never end. Peace was a long year away.



MAP 5 - The Island of Babeldaob



MAP 6 - The Island of Koror and Vicinity

Chapter Three

THE LONG YEAR

**War on Babeldaob
1944 - 1945**

When I think back [it] comes into my mind...how we were very poor inside the caves, not knowing how long the war is going to take, and not knowing how long the Japanese are...going to be nice to us.¹

At that time I was so scared, so whenever the Japanese told us to do something we follow because we don't want to die. They forced us to leave our house and go and live in the jungle because we were in the way of the war...At night we were like animals because at night we would cook our food and garden because the soldiers told us they shouldn't be able to see smoke or fire during the daytime...so we did everything at night. That is the only way we could cook and eat.²

I remember passing several Japanese. They were leaning against a tree in the forest with their bayonets and they were saying in Japanese, "The boat is coming tomorrow. The boat is coming tomorrow." And on our way back, after the war we passed some of these places and we'd see...the bayonet next to the pile of bones.³

In those days it became sort of natural to see a child lying there, you know, alive, but cannot move, because it is starving...We would see a mother holding a baby and the baby is breathing, the mother is dead. That kind of thing became so common and we couldn't do anything. We ourselves were starving.⁴

The invasion of Peleliu and Angaur brought war into the heart of Palau. As the southern islands became first battlefields and then American bases, Babeldaob and Koror were placed in the category of "bypassed" islands, which were to be patrolled and "neutralized", to ensure that the Japanese would remain incapable of a counter attack.

¹Delirang (W 1900).

²Direou Orrukei (W 1925).

³Dr. Anthony Polloi (M 1936).

⁴Alfonso Oiterong (M 1924) : KRW Interview 30 October 1990, Koror, Palau.

In August and September, during the build-up of air and carrier strikes accompanying the Peleliu and Angaur operations, most Palauans in Koror took refuge on Babeldaob. Those already living on the big island moved away from their villages and into the jungle. The Japanese took over most of the housing, while Islanders built make-shift huts in amongst the trees or found caves in which to shelter.⁵ The jungle retreats of the Islanders became known as *hinanba* or "place[s] of refuge".⁶

With the invasion of Peleliu and Angaur, approximately 37,000 Japanese troops consisting of Army, Navy and labour personnel were trapped on Babeldaob, along with Japanese government officials and civilians, many of whom had been recruited by the military.⁷ They were to share the island throughout the war with about 5,000 Islanders.⁸ Palau was completely cut off from the outside world and supply ships were no longer able to provide the Japanese with food. This large population put enormous pressure on remaining supplies and local food resources which, already depleted, were continually being destroyed by Allied air raids.

⁵Father Felix Yaoch (M 1932).

⁶Higuchi, "Micronesians and the Pacific War : The Palauans" in Ballendorf, Shuster and Higuchi, p. 94. This term was used by some Palauans in interviews, for example Father Felix Yaoch and Woman, Ngermid (1922).

⁷Exact numbers of Japanese troops and civilians on Babeldaob at this time are difficult to establish. At the surrender on 2 September 1945, troops in the whole of Palau totalled 34,773 (made up of 18,493 Army, 6,407 Navy and 9,873 labour personnel). See Richard, *United States Naval Administration of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands, Volume 2 - The Postwar Military Government Era, 1945-1947*, p. 18. During the war, captured enemy documents suggested that troop numbers were 25,000 on Babeldaob, 1,400 on Angaur and 10,500 on Peleliu (Total 36,900), see Ibid. p. 152. The records of Marine Fighter Squadron 122 also mention that the number of "enemy personnel" in the "local theater" was "an estimated 30,00 to 38,000". *War Diary VMF 122*, Wednesday, 27 June 1945. Higuchi, working from various Japanese sources, offers similar figures for Army and Navy but with other units, including a civilian component, suggests the total of Japanese military at the surrender was 45,000. However, given that the components of her figures do not add up to the total she gives, the figures must be doubted. See Higuchi, "Micronesians and the Pacific War : The Palauans" in Ballendorf, Shuster & Higuchi, p. 99. Peattie, also working from Japanese figures, notes that over 2,000 Japanese soldiers died of starvation and disease alone, p. 304. The most likely figure for troop levels during the war, therefore, would be a combination of the clear American figure of surrendered Japanese (ie, survivors), with the approximate number of deaths during hostilities, (at least 2,000). This number of losses should be raised a little to allow for deaths from American bombing. Hence my total of 37,000.

⁸At the surrender 5,350 Islanders were under American control. This figure probably includes the Islanders on Angaur. See *Official War Diary, Peleliu Island Commander*, 5 October 1945 for September 1945 (Operational Archives, Naval Historical Center, Washington DC). Allowing for approximately 200 Islanders who remained on Angaur the number of people on Babeldaob would have been nearer 5,000.

In her article about Palauans at war, anthropologist Karen Nero states that, "The image that overwhelms all other Palauan recollections of World War II, the "War of Japan and America" is one of famine".⁹ My interviews with Palauans also reveal the horrors of starvation, but suggest that it was one element of a total battle for survival. These Palauans faced not only hunger, but also the continuing bombing and strafing raids by American planes, the frustration and growing brutality of the Japanese and the fear and confusion that all these factors produced. The exact nature of the trials Islanders had to bear varied depending on where they were living and how closely involved they were with the Japanese.

Before examining the pattern of American air attacks against Babeldaob, it is necessary to outline the general location of the Japanese troops and administrative services which were to be their main targets. Japanese were spread across Babeldaob, but there were areas of particular concentration, especially the provinces of Aimeliik, Ngatpang and Airai.

The *Nan'yo-cho* headquarters had been transferred to the Tropical Research Institute in Aimeliik so a large population of Japanese was there, both military and civilian.¹⁰ This was the government and administrative centre for the Japanese during the war, although conditions limited its organizational powers.

Many of the Palauan residents of villages in Koror, such as Ngermid, took refuge in Aimeliik. A large number went to the jungled area of the "second Koror" at Ngarabotal.¹¹ People recall that many Japanese lived out the war in Aimeliik. Benged Sechewas remembers that there was a large base of Japanese soldiers there, close to the place in which she took refuge.¹² Rose Kebekol, who moved from Arakabesang, also recalled "uncounted numbers of Japanese" in the Aimeliik area. Many of the civilians

⁹Nero, "Time of Famine..." in White & Lindstrom (ed.), p. 117.

¹⁰Peattie, p. 299.

¹¹Augusta Ramarui (W 1923), Direou Orrukei and other KRW Interviews with Palauans. See also Kyota Denkogl (M 1928) : WH Interview 13 April 1985, Andres Demei (M 1924) : WH Interview 22 April 1985, Tadashi Ichikawa (M 1925) : WH Interview 15 December 1985. All WH Interviews in Higuchi, *Micronesians and the Pacific War : Interviews...*

¹²Benged Sechewas (W 1916).

who worked for various companies had been transferred to that province and there were "plenty of soldiers" as well.¹³ Rose lived in a cave with her children, because the large Japanese population made the area a major target for the American bombers and there was strafing "everywhere, all the time".¹⁴

As in most places, the Japanese occupied the centre, while the Palauans established themselves in *hinanba* in the surrounding jungle.¹⁵ Temel Ngirchorachel was attending school in Airai when the war started. When the bombing worsened and the school closed he moved to Aimeliik to live in a cave in the jungle. He remembers that there were a lot of Japanese nearby but they remained in separate refuges from the Palauans.¹⁶ The Japanese ordered Mereb Eruang to move from Koror to Aimeliik. There he lived in the jungle away from the centre of the village. At night he went over to the military camp to work as a fisherman for the soldiers.¹⁷

Despite large numbers of soldiers in Aimeliik, the headquarters and communications centre for the Japanese military in Palau was at Ngatpang. The troops in Palau were based around the Fourteenth "Sunlight" Division, under the command of the Lt. General Inoue Sadae. This Division's headquarters had been in Koror, but once the southern islands had been taken and frequent bombing made Koror uninhabitable, the headquarters were transferred to Ngatpang.¹⁸ Jonathon Emul had been employed

¹³An American interrogation of a Japanese POW established that on either side of the main west coast road leading from Airai through Aimeliik to Ngatpang there was a heavy concentration of Japanese troops "usually in camouflaged tents". *War Diary MAG 11*, Report of Interrogation of POW, 9-11 May 1945.

¹⁴Rose Kebekol (W 1922).

¹⁵Alfonso Oiterong.

¹⁶Temel Ngirchorachel (M 1928). Also see Yoshiyasu Morikawa (M 1919) : WH Interview 25 October 1986, Ehime, Japan in Wakako Higuchi, *Interviews with Former South Sea Bureau and Military Officials*. (Typescript, MARC, University of Guam, 1987), pp. 169-176. In this interview Morikawa stated that Palauans "were evacuated inland to the jungle or to a place distant from the military encampment and operations." p. 170.

¹⁷Mereb Eruang (M 1914).

¹⁸Peattie, p. 299. American interrogation of POWs provided them with the information that Ngatpang was the location of the Headquarters of the 14th Division and this was substantiated by aerial photographs. *War Diary VMF 122*, Wednesday 4 July 1945. Therefore Ngatpang and known bivouac areas in Ngatpang and West Ngatpang were regular targets for American bombing and strafing. *War Diary VMF 122*, Wednesday 27 June 1945. American fighters made regular strikes against Ngatpang from November 1944 onwards. For examples see entries in *War Diary VMF 122* from 12 November onwards.

by the military to help construct barracks at Ngatpang and once they were established he remained there, assigned to work a group of soldiers. He remembers that "most of the concentration of Japanese forces" was at Ngatpang.¹⁹ Itebang Luii also worked at Ngatpang for the field operation depot. From the *Shudan-Shirei-bu* or "collective headquarters"²⁰ in that province, troops and military police were sent out to the other sectors.²¹ The Palauans in Ngatpang moved into hiding in the jungle .

Airai, with its airfield and other military facilities, was also a major centre for Japanese troops.²² Anthony Polloi remembered many soldiers stationed there. Even before the March raid he had seen large numbers of army personnel living in huts and he had been fascinated by their horses and by some of the men who had been practising sumo wrestling.²³ During the war Airai retained its importance as a base for Japanese troops. Young boys like Minoru Ueki and Wilhelm Rengiil, who were drafted to work for the military, spent much of their time living near the soldiers' barracks in Airai.²⁴

Mizuho-mura, in Airai, was one of a number of Japanese agricultural settlements set up during the 1930s and early '40s.²⁵ During the war it remained a centre for Japanese civilians, many of whom were recruited into military service, but it also

¹⁹Jonathon Emul (M 1927).

²⁰Itebang Luii (M 1923):WH Interview 28 March 1985. in Higuchi, *Micronesians and the Pacific War : Interviews...*

²¹Baiei Babul (M 1921).

²²The Americans were aware that the Japanese had an administrative headquarters north of the Babeldaob strip in Airai. *War Diary VMF 122*, Tuesday 28 November 1944. From an interrogation of a POW they established that the area near the airstrip in Airai, "Airai Point has been cleared of natives and is now occupied by Japanese military personnel". *War Diary MAG 11*, Report of an Interrogation of POW Nakanrakari, Hozen & Yohena, Chiko.

²³Dr. Anthony Polloi.

²⁴Dr. Minoru Ueki (M 1930) & Wilhelm Rengiil (M 1929). There were wooden shelters and barracks for soldiers and airfield personnel located in a wooded area near the Babeldaob airstrip. *War Diary MAG 11*, Report of Interrogation of POW - Nakanrakari, Hozen & Yohena, Chiko. The Babeldaob strip in Airai was a major target for American raids throughout the war, especially from October 1944 through March 1945, See Appendix B for chart of Number of Sorties per month per location. Figures established through examination of *War Diary MAG 11*.

²⁵Peattie, pp. 170-172.

housed "too many soldiers to count".²⁶ Similar conditions existed in the other Japanese communities on the big island, such as Shimizu-mura in Ngchesar.²⁷

Throughout the rest of Babeldaob, Japanese troops and Palauans co-existed, as smaller garrisons were spread throughout the island. Saruang Bekemekmad remembered there were many soldiers in Ngchesar and they were divided into groups of one hundred or more, stationed "at the different hamlets to guard and watch over the Palauans."²⁸ Termeteet Eusevio recalled that the Nakamura-*butai* was stationed at Ngiwal during the war. It comprised about 30 soldiers. It seemed to him that more troops occupied the western half of Babeldaob than the eastern side, probably because the military and administrative centres were in the west. Also the western side of the island was more accessible from the sea, and so was more likely to be the site of a U.S. landing.²⁹ However, in Melekeok, Direou Orrukei was still forced to leave her home and take shelter in the jungle because the Japanese had moved into her village and informed the Palauans there that they were "in the way".³⁰ Similarly people in Ngarchelong and Ngaraard were told to move away from the village centres, which became barracks and supply depots for the Japanese. Ngkeruker Salii, who had already been forced to leave Angaur and find a home with her relatives on Babeldaob, was distressed at having to move again because she had settled too close to the Japanese garrison at Ollei in Ngarchelong. She moved with her family down to Ngkeklau in Ngaraard.³¹ In Ngaraard, the Japanese "soldiers stayed in the centre,

²⁶Kyota Denkogl. The Americans were aware that agricultural areas such as Mizuho in Airai, and Garumisukan (Asahi-mura) and Yamato-mura in the centre of the island of Babeldaob were locations for large numbers of Japanese. Therefore these places were bombed, strafed and napalmed on a regular basis beginning in November 1944. *War Diary VMF 122*, 24 November 1944.

²⁷Peattie calls this settlement near the Gardok (Ngerdorch) river in Ngchesar, Kiyomizu Mura. Peattie, p. 336n. Augusta Ramarui's village was next to this Japanese community in Ngchesar. During an interrogation of a POW American Intelligence officers learned that "some...natives live at Shimizu and at Honan, between Airai and Shimizu". *War Diary MAG 11*, Report of Interrogation of POW 9-11 May 1945.

²⁸Dengelei Saburo (W 1930).

²⁹Termeteet Eusevio (M 1916) : WH Interview 2 April 1985 in Higuchi, *Micronesians and the Pacific War: Interviews...*

³⁰Direou Orrukei.

³¹Ngkeruker Salii (W 1902).

guarding the supplies and machine guns", while the villagers retreated "deep inside the jungle".³² Ngeremenglui and Ngaraard were the main places to take evacuees from Peleliu and Angaur. The vast majority of these people found a place to stay with relatives in jungle *hinanba*. Although Islanders in general were ordered to take refuge at a distance from the military centres, given the large number of troops occupying the relatively small island of Babeldaob³³ it was impossible to be very far away from *some* concentration of Japanese. In addition a large number of Palauans lived closer to Japanese centres as they worked for the soldiers.

Although many Palauans remained in the same province throughout the long year, others moved back and forth, mainly to search for and transport food, or to establish and work on new farms. Most of this movement occurred at the instigation of the Japanese.³⁴

For the Palauans on Babeldaob, relations with the Japanese were often the very crux of the process of survival. Those Palauans who stayed on Angaur during the American invasion had been in contact with the Japanese, but their daily life was not tied to their relationship with the soldiers. On Babeldaob, however, the degree to which Palauans suffered from the two main dangers - famine and air attacks - was to a large extent determined by the demands of the Japanese. Many Palauans starved as a direct result of the Japanese seizing their farms and other food supplies. Other Islanders died or were injured in air attacks, because they were out in the open, farming or fishing for the Japanese. The Palauans on Babeldaob were still under the administration of Japan and were forced to obey the orders of their occupiers, even when it endangered their lives.

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³²Saruang Bekemekmad (W 1915).

³³Babeldaob is approximately 26 miles long and about 10 miles across at its widest point.

³⁴See numerous interviews including Baiei Babul, Wilhelm Rengiil, Rose Kebekol, Minoru Ueki, Obechou Delutaoch (W 1917) and Tibedaki Olblai (W 1917) : KRW Interview 29-30 November 1990, SCC, Koror, Palau.

While the Palauans and Japanese were retreating into the jungled areas of Babeldaob, units of Marine Aircraft Group 11 (designated MAG 11) were on board ship bound for Peleliu, listening to a series of talks by intelligence officers. They were being prepared for the task ahead of them, the patrolling and neutralization of the northern Palaus and Yap. One of the lectures was an "orientation talk on the Palau group of islands".³⁵ From the perspective of the American pilots and ground crews of MAG 11 this group of islands and its surrounding waters was no more than a Japanese base. It consisted of numerous Japanese installations - supply and ammunition dumps, anti aircraft gun emplacements, barges, ships and barracks for enemy soldiers. It was to be treated as such for many months to come.

As September waned, the squadrons attached to MAG 11 assisted the still bloody combat on Peleliu with air support - bomb strikes and night patrols. Some ground echelon personnel even participated in infantry operations, acting as stretcher bearers and riflemen.³⁶ Twenty five miles to the north, in her hiding place near Koror, Delirang watched the black smoke rise from Peleliu³⁷ and many Palauans on Babeldaob gazed in awe at the red waves they could see washing the beaches at the tip of the island.³⁸ Peleliu was declared secure on 30 September, but fighting continued on the island until late November.³⁹ Fumio Rengiil, a Peleliuan in refuge at Ngaraard, saw bright light shine from the direction of his home island every night, and he knew somehow that "Peleliu [was] no more".⁴⁰

Ironically, as Fumio watched, Peleliu was being transformed from an empty rock shaved of all vegetation by bombing and burning into a small American military town. As the men of MAG 11 settled in, tents appeared in orderly rows, later to be replaced

³⁵*War Diary MAG 11*, 25 September 1944.

³⁶*War Diary VMF 122*, Saturday 23 September 1944 and *War Diary VMF 121*, 22-23 September 1944.

³⁷Delirang.

³⁸See Nero, "Time of Famine..." in White & Lindstrom (ed.), p. 126.

³⁹Ronald H. Spector, *Eagle Against The Sun : The American War with Japan*. (Penguin Books, 1987) p. 421.

⁴⁰Fumio Rengiil (M 1917).

by quonset huts. Mess-halls served hot meals, movies showed every night⁴¹ and a group of pilots calling themselves the "Central Pacific Construction Company" built a "commodious officers club, complete with Bamboo Bar, wooden deck, tables and chairs".⁴² By the end of October "all the evidence of an American occupation was to be found".⁴³

As civilization began to grow on Peleliu during October, it collapsed on Babeldaob, as the daily air raids and bomb strikes began in earnest. Palauans remember that the planes came every day, both during the daylight hours and at night. The war diary of MAG 11 and the records of the squadrons operating under its command reveal that every day and night there were multiple air attacks on Babeldaob. Operations were only cancelled when the weather was so poor that targets were invisible through the thick cloud and rain or the wind was too hazardous for flying.⁴⁴ From October 1944 until early April 1945, there was a steady increase in sorties over the big island.⁴⁵ In October 600 sorties were made across the island to drop bombs, strafe or napalm numerous targets.⁴⁶ The number of planes involved in each daylight raid ranged between 2 and 48.⁴⁷ By February 1945, total sorties for the month doubled the October figure as 1205 planes swept across Babeldaob.⁴⁸

The raids varied in focus. There were general bombing and strafing sweeps over the entire island as well as raids designed specifically to pick out and destroy Japanese

⁴¹War Diary MAG 11, October 1944.

⁴²War Diary VMF 122, October 1944.

⁴³War Diary MAG 11, October 1944.

⁴⁴See various entries in *War Diaries - MAG 11, VMF 122 & 121*.

⁴⁵A "sortie" is the mission of an individual aircraft.

⁴⁶Figures established through detailed examination of daily summaries of aircraft activity in *War Diary MAG 11*.

⁴⁷Night fighters however, generally flew alone. See *WW II Diary/Report File VMF (N) 541*. The biggest single fighter strike involved 48 aircraft, 16 planes each from VMF 122, 121 & 114 on 4 March 1945. *War Diary VMF 121*, 4 March 1945.

⁴⁸Figures established through detailed examination of *War Diary MAG 11*. See Appendix B. It should be noted that this does not mean that there were actually 1205 different aircraft attacking the island, rather that the total number of attacks added up to 1205. In military terms, each time an individual aircraft leaves base on a mission constitutes one sortie.

transport barges and other surface vessels. Other bomb strikes were aimed at particular targets or concentrated on one area of Babeldaob, usually a sector known to be heavily populated by Japanese troops, or the site of enemy storage facilities, radio installations or anti-aircraft batteries. During the hours of darkness, night fighters struck at assigned targets and then "harassed" and "heckled" Koror and Babeldaob with bombs and bullets.⁴⁹ Every day and night, fighters patrolled the land and sea areas "hunting" for targets, and a squadron of torpedo bombers sought out enemy submarines. After completing assigned strikes, planes flew home to base over the big island seeking out and strafing "targets of opportunity".⁵⁰

The main objective of the Marine fighter squadrons was to "suppress enemy activity" in the Western Carolines area - Palau, Yap and Ulithi.⁵¹ The pilots of these squadrons were first and foremost trained for aerial combat, but due to the almost complete lack of enemy aircraft in the area, their task became regular strafing and bombing missions. Many were dissatisfied with this role as it did not fully utilize their training and because the intensity of Japanese anti-aircraft fire from Koror and Babeldaob made such missions "far more hazardous than actual [air] combat". The pilots did not believe that the available targets were "worth the loss of a plane or pilot".⁵²

The daily schedule for the squadrons included regular Combat Air Patrol, during which enemy targets were located and destroyed throughout the northern Palau area.⁵³ In early October 1944, while there was still fighting on Peleliu, these patrols continued throughout the day from dawn to dusk, 6 am to 6 pm.⁵⁴ During this time, groups of

⁴⁹*War Diary MAG 11* - the sorties flown by VMF (N) 541 were called "Night Heckling" or "Harassing".

⁵⁰See *War Diaries of VMF 121, 122, VMF(N) 541 and of VMTB 134*. "Hunting" and "targets of opportunity" are terminologies used regularly in squadron records.

⁵¹*War Diary VMF 122*, May 1945.

⁵²*War Diary VMF 122*, December 1944.

⁵³Marine Fighter Squadrons VMF 122, 121 and 114 shared this task, carrying out the patrols on alternate days.

⁵⁴For example see *War Diary VMF 122*, Thursday 5 October 1944 & Sunday 8 October 1944.

four Corsairs (one Division in Marine terminology) patrolled for periods of two hours at a time. By mid October Combat Air Patrol was reduced to morning and night forays, the first usually from about 5:30 until 7:30 am, and the second from 4 to 6 pm.⁵⁵ At 6 pm the Marine Night fighters carried out Night Patrol until 6 am the next morning.⁵⁶ During March and April 1945, the daytime patrol was increased again to three times a day and occasionally all day, but for most of the long year, 4 planes on regular dawn and dusk patrols were the norm.⁵⁷

The task of pilots on these patrols was to hunt for suitable enemy targets - buildings of all types (including individual dwellings), boats, trucks, ammunition and food dumps, barracks, gun positions and any personnel out in the open. As early as November 1944, pilots were reporting "a dearth of suitable strafing targets"⁵⁸ and complaining that "hunting was poor on the whole".⁵⁹ When this occurred they would strafe known enemy areas, or targets attacked on previous occasions.⁶⁰ Alternatively, they would fly dangerously low, "searching at 25' to 30' " in order to find camouflaged huts, barges and other enemy equipment and facilities.⁶¹ After dark, Hellcat night fighters would drop bombs intermittently throughout the night and prowl over the northern Palaus on "heckling" raids.⁶² American forces were aware that much Japanese enemy activity took place under the cover of darkness, so these raids were

⁵⁵See *War Diary VMF 122*. These times varied occasionally, but only by a half hour.

⁵⁶See *WW II Diary /Records VMF (N) 541*.

⁵⁷See *War Diaries VMF 122 & 121*.

⁵⁸*War Diary VMF 122*, Tuesday 31 October 1944.

⁵⁹*Ibid*, Friday 24 November 1944.

⁶⁰On Friday 24 November, because "hunting was poor" towns including Mizuho and Ngatpang "received a thorough strafing". *War Diary VMF 122*. In December pilots were strafing buildings that "appeared to be empty and showed signs of having been strafed many times". *War Diary VMF 122*, Friday 1 December 1944.

⁶¹*War Diary VMF 122*, Sunday 8 October 1944. In April 1945 it was noted that "Obvious targets have long since been reduced to rubble. Possible camouflaged targets have been ferreted out and bombed". *War Diary VMF 122*.

⁶²For example on the night of 4 November bombs were released intermittently at the following times : 1850 - Koror, 1900 - Babeldaob, 2115 Airai, 2045 - Malakal, 2400 - Koror, 1145, 0145 & 1245 - Koror, 0445 - Babeldaob. See *WW II Diary/ Report File VMF (N) 541*.

designed to break up those operations. Regular "harassing raids" were conducted "on points of activity in the Palaus which were observed while on night patrols". Babeldaob and Koror were included among the major targets.⁶³ Darkness and cloud cover made the results of night attacks almost impossible to determine.⁶⁴

As well as these regular patrols, Marine aircraft took part in daily "barge sweeps" and "bomb strikes". Concern about the amount of Japanese barge and boat activity and fear of possible enemy infiltration to Peleliu, meant that barges and other vessels became the primary target during bombing and strafing sweeps. Barge sweeps were conducted at regular intervals, about four to five times a day and sometimes as many as ten. While they concentrated on transport boats, they also hit shore facilities, people out in fishing boats and any other "targets of opportunity", using bombs and machine gun fire.⁶⁵ These were always carried out by a division of four planes, which sometimes divided into two sections of two planes each, to seek out enemy activity in different areas.⁶⁶ Sometimes, sweeps were designed to provide all day coverage of Palau, from about 7 am through to nearly 7 pm.⁶⁷

Bomb strikes were usually scheduled for early morning or late afternoon.⁶⁸ The focus of these raids altered as time passed and concerns changed. Initially bombs were dropped on enemy installations and facilities, including the airstrip at Airai on Babeldaob, radio and communication facilities at Ngatpang, bridges, coastal defence positions and all types of buildings. Repeated attacks from October 1944 to May 1945

⁶³*WW II Diary/Report File VMF (N) 541*, November 1944 Summary.

⁶⁴*Ibid.* Most entries include the phrase "no damage could be estimated".

⁶⁵Ascertained by detailed examination of daily entries in *War Diaries VMF 121* and *VMF 122*.

⁶⁶See entries in *War Diary VMF 121*. On Wednesday 18 July 1945 Captain William L. Branagan of VMF 122 reported that "My Division had split into sections to more effectively cover the island. My wingman and I were working over the western half of the island". *War Diary VMF 122*, Wednesday 18 July 1945.

⁶⁷For example on 14 March 1945 barge sweeps conducted by VMF 121 went out at overlapping intervals as follows - 0700-0800, 0800-0905, 0900-1015, 0950-1115, 1050-1200, 1245-1405, 1450-1500, 1555-1730, 1555-1710 & 1645-1845. *War Diary VMF 121*, 14 March 1945. At the beginning of December 1944, the change to "daylight savings" brought all clocks forward one hour, hence patrols began and ended closer to 7 am/pm rather than 6am/pm. *War Diary VMF 121*, 5 December 1944.

⁶⁸Ascertained from a detailed examination of daily entries in *War Diaries* of *VMF 122* & *VMF 121*.

turned these to rubble and "obvious bombing targets [became] non-existent".⁶⁹ In late January and February 1945, boats and barges capable of carrying troops were sought out as the fear of a Japanese invasion of Peleliu proved to be grounded.

Before sunrise on the morning of Thursday, 18 January 1945, under the cover of a heavy rainstorm, 54 Japanese landed on the island. Most were killed or captured that day, but the attack made American forces realize that a larger invasion by the Japanese was a possibility.⁷⁰ By June, enemy personnel had also infiltrated a number of the small rock islands between Koror and Peleliu.⁷¹ Therefore in that month the "emphasis" of bombing and strafing sweeps

shifted from the destruction of obvious targets of which there are none, to the destruction of enemy personnel of which there is an estimated 30,000 to 38,000.⁷²

Bivouac and barrack areas and "wooded terrain" believed to hide troops were attacked constantly.⁷³ The nature of the terrain meant that the results of the strikes were rarely able to be observed.⁷⁴ The outer rock islands of Urukthapel and Eil Malk were also bombed and napalmed to destroy enemy mortar positions and any troops that had managed to occupy those areas.⁷⁵

In February 1945 the intelligence officer for Marine Fighter Squadron 121 noted that

Apparent preparations for a long defence by the Japanese on Babelthuap and nearby islands is seen in the new ground defence positions which have recently been constructed and is also evidenced by the large scale ground clearing activities. This ground clearing and brush burning is apparently in preparation for planting additional gardens, possibly indicating a serious decrease in food supplies.⁷⁶

⁶⁹*War Diary VMF 122*, Summary June 1945.

⁷⁰*War Diary VMF 121*, 18 January 1945.

⁷¹*War Diary VMF 122*, Thursday 1 June 1945.

⁷²*Ibid.*

⁷³*War Diary VMF 122*, Thursday 28 June 1945 & Summary July 1945.

⁷⁴*War Diary VMF 121*, 25 June 1945.

⁷⁵*War Diary MAG 11*. These islands became constant targets in May and June of 1945.

⁷⁶*War Diary VMF 121* Summary February 1945.

This squadron therefore, decided to "take advantage of this food shortage".⁷⁷ On each sweep, the Division's leader would carry napalm to be dropped on the more developed of the enemy gardens.⁷⁸ The other squadrons under the command of MAG 11 later followed suit, making "gardens and cultivated areas" their "principal targets".⁷⁹ The attacks were seen as part of "a long continued attempt to reduce the available food supply of the Northern Palaus".⁸⁰ These later phases of bombing, with their concentration on personnel and gardens, had more effect on Palauans, especially those recruited to work on farms for the Japanese.

While for the American squadrons there were various forms of air attack on the northern Palaus, Palauans themselves were generally not aware of these specific differences. They did not distinguish between being strafed by aircraft on a barge sweep or being shot at by planes on combat air patrol. They *did* recognize that Japanese facilities and personnel were major targets and they became aware of which activities put them most at risk. Everyone learned the general routine of the regular patrols - morning and afternoon - but they also realized there were other unscheduled attacks. Often they had no choice about risking dangerous situations if they were under Japanese orders. Depending on where they took refuge and what work they did for the Japanese, Islanders were forced into different degrees of danger. Fishermen were at particular risk from barge sweeps, people living or working near Japanese encampments from strikes on Japanese troops and those labouring on farms from napalm strikes on gardens.

For all Palauans and the Japanese, the intensity and frequency of the air attacks severely limited daily life. Bombing and strafing caused injury and death and destroyed food supplies, bringing about starvation and disease. The raids continued for almost a

⁷⁷Ibid.

⁷⁸*War Diary VMF 121*, 1 March 1945.

⁷⁹*War Diary VMF 122*, Wednesday 18 July 1945.

⁸⁰*War Diary VMF 122*, Monday 6 August 1945 & also see other August entries for examples of napalming gardens.

year - from September 1944 right up until the last day of the war on 15 August 1945. In this environment, with relations with the Japanese declining rapidly, "One year is a long time. One day is long, very long."⁸¹

*

During the last year of the war Koror was a town without civilians. The hill to the north of the town, near the village of Ngermid, became known to the Americans as "Battery Hill", because of the great number of Japanese anti-aircraft guns positioned there.⁸² Air attacks on Koror did not much affect Palauans because virtually all had been evacuated to Babeldaob. However, those Palauans who worked for the Japanese, transporting food and other supplies across the channel between Koror and Babeldaob, were at great risk. During the day, barges used to ferry people and supplies across the causeway were hidden under overhanging trees on the edge of the channel.⁸³ The soldiers brought them out usually only during the night⁸⁴ and often employed Islanders to help carry and load materials. Wilhelm Rengiil had to join the soldiers

every evening around 8 o' clock [because] in Koror there were lots of stores, food, so soldiers who are in the main island...usually come at night to get rice and flour and food from Koror and...transport [it] by military boat.⁸⁵

It was a little safer at night because the barges were not as easily seen as they were during daylight. However, Wilhelm remembers one evening when an American plane appeared overhead and fired at the vessel he was on. The barge caught fire and the flames started to roar. He and the other Islanders dived straight into the water and swam to safety. Many of the Japanese did not react so quickly. The next morning Wilhelm returned to the scene and

⁸¹Fumio Rengiil.

⁸²*War Diary VMF 121*, Summary March 1945.

⁸³*War Diary MAG 11*, Report of Interrogation of POWs Nakanrakari, Hozen & Yohena, Chiko, July 1945.

⁸⁴*War Diary MAG 11*, Report of Interrogation of POW 9-11 May 1945.

⁸⁵Wilhelm Rengiil.

when we went to the boat [there were] eight of them there and inside the boat its red all over, its blood all over. And not only that but it got burned...its really strange but our skin when it burns, you can see the veins - blue and its very scary.⁸⁶

Rengiil was lucky to escape without injury, probably because the vessel was only transporting food supplies. Others were not so fortunate. In July 1945, while on a surprise early morning barge sweep, planes opened fire on a small boat carrying ammunition. It "disintegrated with a large explosion".⁸⁷ A larger vessel carrying ammunition, fuel and estimated 40 men was strafed by aircraft on dusk patrol. The explosion blew the stern off the craft and the roaring flames were seen by an Allied vessel 25 miles away. The following morning nothing was left except floating debris and an oil slick.⁸⁸

During the period from October 1944 to March 1945, the air strip at Airai was regularly the major focus for American attacks.⁸⁹ Supply buildings and Japanese bivouac areas near the airfield were targeted and as a result of repeated bombing, the strip became cratered. The many Palauans staying in refuges in the Airai area, especially those working at or near the airfield itself, were at risk from these raids. American pilots had noted numerous tracks in a small clearing north of the strip, and on one occasion had reported seeing "two men wearing white shirts run for cover from this clearing".⁹⁰ The area immediately became a target for bombs and napalm.

Before being employed to transport food, Wilhelm Rengiil had taken shelter in a cave, right next to the place in Airai where he worked for the Japanese boiling gallon after gallon of seawater to extract the salt. With no supplies coming into Palau, the Japanese relied on Palauans to labour at such tasks to cater for the soldiers' daily

⁸⁶Ibid.

⁸⁷*War Diary VMF 121*, 7 July 1945.

⁸⁸*War Diary VMF 121*, June 1945.

⁸⁹*War Diary MAG 11* - See Appendix B.

⁹⁰*War Diary VMF 122*, Tuesday 28 November 1944.

needs.⁹¹ Wilhelm saw American planes appear regularly, morning and night and he had to rush under cover when they fired. He remembers that as time passed "the war was so intense, so hard", the bombing so heavy and frequent, that he was no longer required to work for the soldiers. This was probably during the period January to March/April 1945 when sorties over Babeldaob totalled over 1000 per month, with many targeting the Babeldaob strip.⁹² At that time, Wilhelm and his family fled to a cave in the jungle. Wilhelm believes he only survived because of the "hide-out" he and his family found, as

Everyday from Peleliu there would be a dozen, sometimes dozen to eighteen [planes] dropping bombs all over...So it was very hard for everybody to go out fishing and even to go out and look for something to eat.⁹³

He, his brother and his father would leave the cave to go and fish and farm at night or very early in the morning, when there were few or no planes. They learned over time that

everyday, at least ten to fifteen small, one pilot warplane, they come and do routine check-up, patrol, everyday. So you don't have a chance to go and plant sweet potatoes, so what we do, during the daytime we sleep and in the evening we go and work on the farm and plant.⁹⁴

For about three months, life continued in this manner before Rengiil was called up to work for the military again. This was probably in May 1945, when the main focus of

⁹¹ An American interrogation of two Japanese soldiers who escaped from Babeldaob to Peleliu confirms that the Japanese were forced to manufacture salt from seawater on Babeldaob because of severe shortages. *War Diary MAG 11*, Report of Interrogation of Nakanrakari, Hozen & Yohena, Chiko. July 1945.

⁹²From examination of entries in *War Diary MAG 11*.

⁹³Wilhelm Rengiil. During the period January-March, there were 4 or 5 barge sweeps of 4 planes each, every day (i.e in total = 16-20 planes). In addition there were a number of coordinated attacks involving up to 16 aircraft, each from the three fighter squadrons. Rengiil's memory relates to either or both of these types of raids. See *War Diaries, VMF 122 & 121*, January-March 1945.

⁹⁴Ibid. Probably referring to planes on Combat Air Patrol which did come at regular times each day. There would be 8 altogether - 4 on dawn and 4 on dusk patrol. As noted, during some months (including March 1945) the planes came three times a day or all day. That increased the total number of planes patrolling over the island to 12 or more. See *War Diary VMF 122*, March 1945.

American raids shifted from Babeldaob to Japanese positions in the rock islands between Peleliu and Koror.⁹⁵

Anthony Polloi and Minoru Ueki were also in Airai during most of the long year. Anthony, without the knowledge of his parents, regularly went out fishing with a group of Japanese. He speared fish for them and kept some aside for his family. Sometimes he traded some of his catch with the Japanese for rice. He recalls that American planes patrolled morning and afternoon and at times he "would be fishing on the open shore when American fliers would come and just go down and start shooting". On one occasion a plane appeared and

I remember people falling down and dying next to me...So I went for my life, went into the mangrove swamp, and my father found out about this and he had to take me away to my other relatives elsewhere where I could not go out fishing.⁹⁶

Fighter pilots regularly reported strafing fishing vessels.⁹⁷ In most cases the "occupants" were killed and only rarely were survivors seen swimming to safety.⁹⁸ The death toll from strafing such targets was quite high. On one day's barge sweeps the intelligence officer for VMF 122 reported that "Some seventeen (17) individuals ostensibly engaged in fishing around the coasts of Babeldaob were strafed and killed".⁹⁹

Minoru Ueki spent most of the war at Mizuho in Airai, working with a group of about 30 other youths. They farmed for the soldiers and also participated in some military training. He recalls that after Peleliu and Angaur were occupied by the Americans,

⁹⁵The focus was on enemy mortar positions and possible bivouac areas on Urukthapel and Eil Malk. *War Diary MAG 11*, May & June 1945 & *War Diary VMF 121*, May 1945. The squadrons also provided ground support for American landings on these islands. *War Diary VMF 121*, 5 & 8 May 1945 & *War Diary VMF 122*, Tuesday 8 May 1945. These raids were also designed to "discourage further attempts at infiltration by the Japanese". *War Diary VMF 122*, Tuesday 22 May 1945.

⁹⁶Dr. Anthony Polloi.

⁹⁷See *War Diary VMF 122*. In the period December 1944 - March 1945 there are 14 mentions of small fishing boats - rowboats, canoes, rafts - being strafed and sunk. During each incident 2 or more vessels were strafed.

⁹⁸*War Diary VMF 122*, Saturday, 16 December 1944.

⁹⁹*War Diary VMF 122*, Sunday 15 April 1945.

from then, almost everyday...plane comes up around eight o' clock - it would be flying and shooting at anything that moves, or any smoke and about 11:30 they'll be disappearing. Then lunch hour, maybe they're playing tennis or something. We used to say they were playing because when they came - they were just small planes from Peleliu...you can see them [the pilots] all no shirt. And we were even made afraid because they were red...not yellow like Japanese.¹⁰⁰

Except when sweeps were specifically organized to maintain all day coverage of the northern Palaus, there were breaks between attacks. These often occurred in the middle of the day.¹⁰¹ Pilots flew very low, sometimes "at deck level" to seek out camouflaged targets.¹⁰² On attacking runs they would fly down in a steep dive, "allowing just enough time to pull out above the treetops".¹⁰³ At this altitude the pilots would have been readily visible to people on the ground.

This low altitude also meant that when a plane got into trouble, Palauans were able to witness the entire incident. During strafing and bombing runs, American planes were sometimes shot down by Japanese anti-aircraft fire. The records of Marine Aircraft Group Eleven reveal the loss of 42 planes between September 1944 and August 1945.¹⁰⁴ However, pilots and crew were almost always rescued.¹⁰⁵ Minoru Ueki recalls watching a fighter plane hit by Japanese guns crash into the sea near Koror and then he

saw this amphibious plane come and rescue. They just land and you see all these guns attacking them...you could see the water go up because they are shooting at them and the plane slowly touch down and then you see it manoeuvring around...and [then the] plane just picked the guy up.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁰Dr. Minoru Ueki.

¹⁰¹Cases are numerous but see for example *War Diary VMF 121*, 1, 9 & 13 November 1944, 7 December 1944, 19 March 1945, 6 April 1945 & *War Diary VMF 122*, 19 March 1945, 2 & 3 June 1945.

¹⁰²Ground level. See *War Diary VMF 122*, Thursday 19 October 1944.

¹⁰³*Aircraft Action Report VMF 121*, 26 January 1945 filed with *War Diary VMF 121*.

¹⁰⁴*War Diary MAG 11*, Enemy Targets Destroyed 27 September 1944-31 August 1945. One hundred and seventy one planes were also damaged, but returned to base. Given a total number of sorties over Palau for this same period of 11,322, the loss rate averages out at approximately 1 aircraft lost per 270 sorties.

¹⁰⁵See cases in records of *MAG 11* & *VMF 121* & *122*.

¹⁰⁶*Ibid.*

Amphibious seaplanes known to Marine fliers as "Dumbos" accompanied every sortie over Palau. American records reveal the regularity with which downed men were brought to safety, either by Dumbos or by US ships lying offshore.¹⁰⁷ It is likely that the daring rescue witnessed by Minoru Ueki is the same as the incident recorded in the VMF 121 war diary on 4 March 1945. First Lieutenant Walter Brown's plane was hit by anti-aircraft fire over Battery Hill in Koror. With his plane on fire he headed for the nearest water and "shielding his face from the flames with his right hand, he bailed out", landing only 1000 yards off-shore. The plane crashed into the bay. After locating the downed man from the trail of dye he had released into the water, Dumbo pilot Lieutenant Colonel Namer approached, "ignoring the A/A fire" and landed his rescue plane only 2000 yards from the shore.¹⁰⁸ He taxied towards the injured pilot, while "mortars and dual purpose guns threw shells into the water" around him. Throwing out a lifebuoy and a rope he moved through the firing, dragging the man to a safer location to complete the rescue. Three times the weakened pilot lost his grip and the Dumbo had to circle back to pick him up. Pilots from the other squadrons involved in that day's attack continued to circle and "strafe the shore area throughout the rescue". The Dumbo returned Lieutenant Brown safely to base where he was hospitalized with major burns and a shrapnel wound. This was considered by the intelligence officer of VMF 121 to be "the most heroic and daring rescue ever credited to a Dumbo outfit"¹⁰⁹, an opinion supported by Minoru Ueki, who "felt that they were very brave people".¹¹⁰

At night the American planes and the men in them became invisible, but Minoru could hear the aircraft flying over and for him it was a "nerve-breaking sound". Just that noise was enough to make him apprehensive and he knew that

if they see any fire they would come down and shoot at it. So we
were particularly imprisoned...unable to do much. But we

¹⁰⁷See cases in records of *MAG 11* & *VMF 121* & *122*.

¹⁰⁸A/A fire is fire from anti-aircraft weapons.

¹⁰⁹Description of rescue and all quotations taken from *Aircraft Action Report, VMF 121*, 4 March 1945 filed with *War Diary VMF 121*.

¹¹⁰Dr. Minoru Ueki.

managed, we knew what tree to use so that there would be less smoke, or how to prevent smoke going out.¹¹¹

Minoru also recalls that he started to become aware of the routine of the flights, so that it was possible to establish some "safe" times.

For some Palauans it seemed as if it was never safe. One woman, who took refuge in Airai during the war, lived in a cave with a number of other women and their children. Although she was not in the same immediate danger as people out in the open working for the Japanese, she felt trapped. She seldom emerged from the shelter, because it was too dangerous. When the war began she was pregnant and later she gave birth inside the cave. She ate only once a day and then had to sit and breastfeed three babies, her own and two others, whose mothers were too weak to feed them. There was very little food, so the other women gave their small share to her so that she would produce enough milk to feed all the babies. There could be no fire for cooking or heat because the smoke would attract the planes.¹¹² Everyday she sat with the babies on her lap to keep them warm. She held them in such a way that when they urinated it would trickle away into the ground. The mothers were not allowed to use diapers for the babies because they could not wash them or hang them out to dry, for the Japanese told them the white cloth would be a target for the American bombers. Today this woman says she "despises the war because it made us so poor".¹¹³

A little further north, in the province of Aimeliik, Mengesebuuch Yalap's niece died because the baby's mother was not able to get enough to eat to breastfeed. The planes came over everyday making it impossible to farm, except at night, so food was very scarce.¹¹⁴ Temel Ngirchorachel recalls that aircraft bombed and strafed in Aimeliik almost every day but only dropped bombs at night.¹¹⁵ During the day,

¹¹¹Ibid.

¹¹²Pilots did attack areas where they detected smoke as they were considered to be evidence of "apparent enemy activity". *War Diary VMF 122*, Sunday 5 August 1945.

¹¹³Woman, Ngermid (1922).

¹¹⁴Mengesebuuch Yalap (W 1929).

¹¹⁵*WW II War Diary/Report File VMF (N) 541*, 1 November 1944. Bombs included General Purpose (GP) bombs, fragmentation and incendiary clusters.

fighters did make both bomb strikes and general strafing raids, while the task of the night fighters was to release their bombs intermittently during the night, before commencing their routine patrol. Records suggest that early in their operations, pilots had to request permission to strafe targets.¹¹⁶ By the middle of the year strafing became common practice.¹¹⁷ All Temel remembers about the raids is that they "scared" him and he "had to run to hide".¹¹⁸ Mereb Eruang saw "four big aeroplanes" every morning and watched them fly east and west and around the island dropping bombs. It was too dangerous to fish during daylight because "we would get shot", so the men went out at night instead. In order to work faster, they often used explosives to stir up the water and stun the fish so they would just float up to the surface.¹¹⁹ Even at night Mereb was in danger, as on a number of occasions Hellcats strafed "small wooden boats" and other surface craft. The occupants were believed to be "enemy personnel".¹²⁰ Moonlit nights were particularly risky as American pilots could sometimes pick out the shapes of boats or see the moonlight reflected in their wake.¹²¹

Despite the dangers, Rose Kebekol often went out of the cave during the daytime in search of food for her parents and her children.

We would watch for when the planes went away and then we would run outside and go looking for food. If they came back we would hide ourselves underneath the bushes.¹²²

¹¹⁶Ibid., 6 October 1944 & 25 January 1945.

¹¹⁷Ibid., 1 June 1945, 16 & 25 July 1945, 7 August 1945.

¹¹⁸Temel Ngirchorachel.

¹¹⁹Mereb Eruang. An interrogation of a Japanese POW who escaped from Babeldaob to Peleliu confirms that Palauans fished for the Japanese, under guard and sometimes used dynamite. *War Diary MAG 11* - Report of Interrogation of POW 9-11 May 1945.

¹²⁰*WW II Diary/Report File VMF(N) 541*, 16 July 1945. During May 1945, 10 "small surface craft" were destroyed and five damaged. See Ibid, Summary May 1945.

¹²¹See for example *Aircraft Action Report VMF(N) 541*, 28 May 1945 attached to *WW II Diary/Report File VMF(N) 541*.

¹²²Rose Kebekol.

She recalled that the bomb strikes seemed to be focussed on "major spots for the Japanese around Aimeliik". On one occasion a bomb landed within two hundred feet of her and she was very lucky that she was not injured. Others were not so fortunate.

I remember one couple who were in their cave right below our caves and the planes shot those fire-like things right into the cave.¹²³ ...At the time that was the worst point of the war ever...They shot everywhere all the time...and these people were unlucky because they were sleeping inside the cave. The husband died, but the wife did not die and...she was screaming and she ran outside for help.¹²⁴

Caves could not offer complete protection as fighters conducted "special hops" to "skip bomb caves" in order to destroy enemy hideouts.¹²⁵

American intelligence was aware that one of the other "major spots for the Japanese" was the headquarters for General Inoue's troops in Ngatpang. During early 1945 they learned more detail about the location and disposition of the Japanese forces from interrogations of Japanese and Korean prisoners of war and a Palauan internee.¹²⁶ These reports provided information about where troops had their bivouac areas, where ammunition, vehicles and food supplies were stored and where the Ngatpang radio station was located.¹²⁷ Intelligence officers were able to establish that a number of units stationed near the main headquarters were "all close together with no attempt at dispersal because of the belief that the heavy foliage of the trees effectively prevents aerial observation".¹²⁸

With this kind of data, and the shift in emphasis from enemy installations to personnel, bombing patterns were arranged to focus on and destroy such barrack and storage areas.¹²⁹ Later interrogations were then used to confirm the effectiveness of

¹²³Possibly referring to a napalm strike. Napalm was used regularly on Babeldaob and the other islands. See *War Diaries, MAG 11, VMF 122 & 121*.

¹²⁴Rose Kebekol.

¹²⁵*War Diary VMF 121*, 15 December 1944.

¹²⁶The Palauan was a man called Itipik. The story of his escape is described later.

¹²⁷See various Reports of Interrogations in *War Diary Mag 11*, 1944-1945.

¹²⁸*War Diary MAG 11*, Report of Interrogation of POW 9-11 May 1945.

¹²⁹For example see Forward to July 1945 entries in *War Diary MAG 11*.

certain bombing tactics. In July 1945, Marine staff learned from a Korean prisoner of war that while rocket strikes did little damage, anti-personnel bombs with VT (variable timer) fuses had been "very effective against personnel, resulting in many casualties". On one occasion, fragments from this particular kind of bomb had whizzed over the Korean's head and landed at least 400 yards away.¹³⁰ The "heavily wooded nature" of much of Babeldaob meant that the results of bombing possible troop areas were largely unknown. POW information made it possible to confirm that these new VT nose fuses had "not only done a substantial amount of material damage, but had served to lower enemy morale throughout the Northern Palaus".¹³¹

Having established the concentration of troops in the Ngatpang district and the most effective forms of bombing, raids became focussed on these places. In early July aircraft from VMF 122 launched a number of large bomb strikes (using GP bombs with VT nose fuses) on Ngatpang and surrounding wooded areas. These aimed to destroy the headquarters of the 14th Division as well as bivouac and storage areas in the vicinity.¹³²

Jonathon Emul, who worked for the soldiers and lived close to their barracks, felt that the Americans must have known exactly where the Japanese were located and where the Palauans lived, because they primarily attacked Japanese targets. They seemed to

know where the concentration of indigenous Palauans were and very seldom they would shoot. They were concentrating on where the Japanese soldiers were dug in.¹³³

This did not prevent Palauans living or working close to troop camps from becoming victims, intended or not, of area bombing. One woman in refuge in Ngaraard was walking towards a Japanese camp to take food to her father who was there, when she heard a bomb. She remembers

¹³⁰*War Diary MAG 11*, Report of Interrogation of POW Nishiyama, Kukei (Korean) July 1945.

¹³¹*War Diary VMF 122*, Summary July 1945.

¹³²See *War Diary VMF 122*, Sunday 1 July, Tuesday 3 July & Wednesday 4 July 1945.

¹³³Jonathon Emul.

I looked up and I saw this bomb coming down so I ran a couple of feet to hide myself because I didn't know what it would do and I watched it and it came down but it didn't explode.¹³⁴

She was lucky that she left the area as many of the bombs had delayed fuses - because they did not explode on impact did not mean they were harmless. Jonathon Emul recalls that the planes would often "shoot before they drop bombs" so people had to be ready to "dive" and take shelter wherever they could, even before the bombs were dropped.¹³⁵ These strafing runs included "dwellings" amongst their targets. On other occasions strafing would be carried out after the release of the bombs.¹³⁶ In the "not very important areas" Jonathon Emul recalls that the planes seemed to shoot only and not drop any bombs. However, Rose Kebekol remembers that after the planes completed their afternoon patrol,

at around about four o' clock...they would return to Peleliu and they would drop the unused ammunition so we could hear it coming down so even if people didn't get shot by the planes they would get hurt by those ammunitions that were on the ground and they would explode. That's how other people got hurt.¹³⁷

Jonathon Emul thinks that perhaps the Americans "had an instruction not to shoot Palauans", but I have found no mention of such an order in the surviving squadron records.¹³⁸ In many cases, when raiding jungled areas, it was impossible for pilots to gauge any result of their strikes. In reports of firing concerning personnel, the word "native" is never used. The terms "Japanese", "enemy personnel" and "soldiers" are mentioned but so too are "individuals", "fisherman" and "occupants" of boats.¹³⁹ In

¹³⁴Woman, Peleliu (1927).

¹³⁵Jonathon Emul. Fighters would often strafe first to "silence" enemy fire before bombing. On an October bombing run the targets of this kind of strafing included 6 dwellings. *War Diary VMF 122*, Tuesday 17 October 1944.

¹³⁶*War Diary VMF 122*, Monday 23 October 1944.

¹³⁷Rose may be referring to delayed fuse bombs some of which exploded between 12 and 24 hours after impact.

¹³⁸There is only a mention of "native areas" marked on a map. See *War Diary MAG 11*, Report of Interrogation of Native Civilian Internee I.Pik (Native of Babelthuap) 30 May 1945. There is no mention of orders to avoid those areas.

¹³⁹See entries in *War Diaries* of *VMF 122*, *VMF 121* and *VMF(N) 541*.

most cases it would have been extremely difficult to tell the race of a person even on a low level flight. Of the many Palauans who worked for the soldiers, most dressed in Japanese style clothes and, by the end of the war, both Islanders and Japanese were in tattered rags.¹⁴⁰

Given the difficulties of identifying people on the ground, American pilots often fired on anyone who was seen. Among the Japanese and Palauans on Babeldaob was a German couple, Pastor Wilhelm Fey and his wife Hanna, Protestant missionaries who remained in Palau during the war.¹⁴¹ Pastor Fey remembers being fired on regularly by American planes. It seemed that the planes came "from sunrise to sunset, every five minutes".¹⁴² The raids were extremely frightening.

You sit in the bush and have a plane coming and shooting into the bush where they see a little bit of smoke or something moving...We dare not sit up in our holes because of shooting, even burning.¹⁴³

During one unexpected raid, Pastor Fey was fired upon and nearly lost his life.

We had been in our hut and we had some chickens¹⁴⁴ and I still had some shoes, white shoes and a boy had been living with us and he cleaned the shoes in the evening and put the shoes on a stick which he put in the soil and then they dry overnight and early in the morning he brought the shoes into the house and forget to take out the sticks. It was still dawning and the chickens get fight and one hopped and killed himself because he jumped onto...the stick. So we began to make it ready for food, cooked it for food and while me and the boy were doing this a plane came. It was dawn and it was already shooting from some distance. So I run to the shelter. The shelter was fifty feet and BRRRR [sound of machine gun]. My wife was sitting in the shelter and shouted and I came and I had splinters of wood in my face. I would have been killed.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁰Augusta Ramarui, for example, wore clothes made out of old rags and banana leaves sewed together.

¹⁴¹Pastor Wilhelm Fey and his wife had come to Palau in 1933 with the Liebenzell Mission.

¹⁴²Pastor Wilhelm Fey (M 1905): KRW Interview 21 July 1990, Canyonville, Oregon.

¹⁴³Ibid.

¹⁴⁴This dates the incident as late 1944 or early 1945 because in the second half of the long year all farm animals would have been eaten or confiscated by the Japanese for food.

¹⁴⁵Ibid.

The Americans were aware of some of the "native" settlement areas and gained a little more information about their locations from interrogations.¹⁴⁶ However, the welfare of Palauans or any civilians was impossible to ensure and was, at any rate, a secondary consideration. The large number of Japanese troops and installations covered most of the land area and their destruction was the primary objective of the Marine fighters, so aircraft regularly "bombarded Babeldaob - east and west coast everyday...from dawn till dusk".¹⁴⁷ In Ngatpang, there was almost "no way to protect yourself", because if a bomb landed where you were "you're gone!".¹⁴⁸ The Japanese had ordered the villagers to prepare places for protection by cutting down coconut trees, laying them on the ground and covering them with dirt to form a shelter. Jonathon Emul remembered that when the planes appeared over that province

wherever you are, you are on your own - nobody there to help - so you learn to protect yourself, even under a tree. I remember one time when we were fishing and the tide was very low, the planes...they came in a group of three, and all of a sudden the plane was on top of us. We couldn't run, all we could do was freeze, so you sit down and not even move. Maybe they knew we were natives or maybe they didn't see us, we don't know, but they circled a couple of times and then they were gone. If they had shot we were dead already because we had no place to protect ourselves, in this area when the tide is very low.¹⁴⁹

When fishing at high tide, the men would dive straight into the water and hold themselves down by hanging onto a rock. They could peer up through the water, trying to hold their breath until the planes left. A number of teenage girls collecting sea cucumbers at low tide protected themselves from the planes by diving under the water. While they held their breaths they also stuck their arms out of the water at odd angles, hoping the pilots would mistake them for pieces of wood.¹⁵⁰ At some regular

¹⁴⁶See *War Diary MAG 11*, Report of Interrogation of Native Civilian Internee I.Pik (Native of Babelthuap) 30 May 1945. Internee stated that the location on the reference map of the "large native area on the West coast of Babeldaob" should be expanded to include further areas. "He state[d] that only natives live in this area".

¹⁴⁷Jonathon Emul.

¹⁴⁸Ibid.

¹⁴⁹Ibid.

¹⁵⁰Story told to Palauan woman, Julie Tellei. Conversation with KRW, 22 November 1990, Ngermid, Koror, Palau.

Ngatpang fishing spots men dug holes on the shore about five feet deep so that as soon as the shooting began they could jump into them.¹⁵¹

In areas such as Ngaraard, which were the temporary homes of many refugees from Peleliu and Angaur and were therefore heavily populated by Palauans, the appearance of the American planes was also a daily occurrence. They came over regularly in the morning or a number of times during the day, shooting everywhere. The planes would then return at night, circling constantly, looking for evidence of smoke or fires.¹⁵² As soon as Skesuk Skang heard the planes she and her family would run out of their hut and into a cave.¹⁵³ Most Palauans in Ngaraard stayed deep in the jungle area and made temporary huts by standing big coconut leaves together to make a shelter.¹⁵⁴ Saruang Bekemekmad and her children made a shelter as far away from the centre of Ngaraard as they could, because "they only dropped bombs near the centre...not in the jungle".¹⁵⁵ Obechou Delutaach remembered that most of the attacks in Ngaraard were aimed at the high place where the Japanese had their gun emplacements.¹⁵⁶ Palauans were mostly in danger when fishing in the open. One afternoon she went out during the day with some friends. They climbed up a hill and onto a big tree so that they could see right down to the shore. They watched two men launch their boat and head out to fish. Moments later a plane began to circle and, as they watched, it fired on the boat and the men were killed. Obechou was distraught. She could see the men dying and there was absolutely nothing she could do.¹⁵⁷

Tibedakl Olblai, who came from Peleliu to Ngeremenglui and then went on to Ngaraard, remembered that there was bombing and strafing all through those areas. It

¹⁵¹Ibid.

¹⁵²See Baiei Babul, Ngkeruker Salii, Skesuk Skang (W 1914) & Tutii Ngirutoi (M 1919), : KRW Interview 26 October 1990, SCC, Koror, Palau,

¹⁵³Skesuk Skang.

¹⁵⁴Tutii Ngirutoi.

¹⁵⁵Saruang Bekemekmad.

¹⁵⁶Obechou Delutaach (W 1917).

¹⁵⁷Ibid.

was mostly people who went out to fish that were killed "because of the hunger they would have to go out and fish for food for their children. They are the ones who got the worst of it".¹⁵⁸

Islanders in Ngaraard were also at risk when working in gardens and fields. Planes would often sweep over the farms, shooting.¹⁵⁹ Obechou recalled that the Japanese ordered Palauans

not to go out into the reef or go around during daytime because the Americans would think that we were Japanese and...they...would shoot at us.¹⁶⁰

In Melekeok and Ngchesar the situation was much the same. People farming and fishing were most at risk. Mesubed worked with the soldiers in Aimeliik and then in Ngchesar. At night he went to sleep in a cave he and his family had dug in the jungle. He gradually became aware that the planes came at fairly regular times so he and the other workers, who were outside during the daytime, could prepare themselves and get into hiding before the planes arrived. While he was labouring, Mesubed "was wholeheartedly for the Japanese", but as time passed the intensity of the American attacks made him begin to think that "the Americans were winning the war, because they had more planes and they dropped more bombs".¹⁶¹

In Ngchesar, as elsewhere, the Japanese took over existing buildings in the villages and forced the Palauans into the jungle. Dengelei Saburo lived in a cave beneath a hut with about ten other members of her family, including her very old and weak mother. She, like Mesubed, began to realize the routine of the planes. It became obvious that in the late afternoon the planes would leave and therefore the shooting would cease. So at this time Dengelei would go into the village to get permission from the Japanese to go and gather coconuts for her family.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁸Tibedaki Olblai (W 1917).

¹⁵⁹Saruang Bekemekmad & Baiei Babul.

¹⁶⁰Obechou Delutaoch.

¹⁶¹Mesubed (M 1922) : KRW Interview 16 November 1990, Koror, Palau.

¹⁶²Dengelei Saburo.

After the death of her husband, Kiari Yaoch moved with the rest of her family from Airai to Ngersuul in Ngchesar. There the planes patrolled regularly "twice a day". However there would also be days when "there would be abundant shooting and bombing".¹⁶³ There was very little people could do except try to hide somewhere when the planes appeared. Many years after the war, Kiari flew over Palau on a commercial flight. While passing over Babeldaob, she looked down out of the window and "saw everything clearly". She realized that "during the time of the war I was busy trying to hide myself, but they [the Americans in the planes] probably would have seen me whatever I did".¹⁶⁴

The bombing and strafing had a strong impact on Palauan families. Although most Islanders took shelter deep in the jungle and avoided going out in the open, the planes controlled their lives and made them "like animals".¹⁶⁵ Many people lost relatives and friends. Ascension Ngelmas' cousin was killed during an American strafing raid. He was out fishing with Ascension's brother when the planes came over. The brother was lucky because, although he was shot in the ankle, he was still able to swim to safety. It was low tide, so he swam underneath the overhang of a rock island and hid until the planes left. Afterwards he retrieved his raft and paddled back to shore with the body of his dead cousin.¹⁶⁶

The Yaoch family was further affected by the war. Felix Yaoch had not been on "good terms" with his older brother for a while.¹⁶⁷ Felix recalls that

He didn't want to be near me because I was too young in his estimation. He was more eager to be with the older ones. I would be in the way, an obstacle.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶³Kiari Yaoch (W 1910). See earlier description of types of raids. The planes which came "twice a day" would have been on dawn and dusk combat air patrol. The days of "abundant shooting and bombing" would be days when bomb or barge sweeps were scheduled.

¹⁶⁴Ibid. This was partially true. In wooded terrain she would have been less likely to have been seen, but that did not put her out of danger from general area bombing.

¹⁶⁵Direou Orrukei.

¹⁶⁶Ascension Ngelmas (W 1915).

¹⁶⁷The older brother's name was not given.

¹⁶⁸Father Felix Yaoch.

It was the older boy's responsibility to look after his younger brother. Most of the time, Felix's brother complained about and avoided this obligation. However, Felix had been away with other relatives for about a week and on his return the two brothers wanted to spend some time together. The boys had been on short expeditions before and always did whatever they could to provide extra food for the family. Felix remembers that they collected and melted "bits of lead" and formed them into home-made pellets for their air-guns. They used these to shoot wild doves. On other days they gathered firewood or sought out the kinds of trees they knew would hold stores of "wild honey". Felix often forgot about the danger of being away from the cave as he was caught up in the adventure of "hunting" with his big brother and the good feeling of helping his parents.¹⁶⁹

The night after his return, Felix recalls that he and his brother were "talking in a very close way", whispering by the fire, planning a crab hunting excursion for the next day. In the morning the older boy and his two friends told Felix to go ahead and promised that they would join him, but instead they

decided to go fishing, and...two [were] older men and so he [Felix' brother] would rather go with the older ones, than to go with the little one, and then the air raid took place and there were bombings...and a lot of strafing. When I came back...he was not around.¹⁷⁰

Before nightfall, Kiari returned from farming. That morning the Japanese had recruited her to go across to Koror island and plant more crops for the soldiers.¹⁷¹ As night began to fall, Felix could see his mother becoming more and more anxious. It was completely dark when the other men returned with a string of fish. At first they lied that the boy was following behind them, but Kiari immediately knew that something had happened to her son. It was like "maternal instinct, she knew right away."¹⁷² The companions then explained that the planes had come over strafing while

¹⁶⁹Ibid.

¹⁷⁰Ibid.

¹⁷¹Kiari Yaoch.

¹⁷²Father Felix Yaoch.

they were out in the open fishing. There were some Japanese fisherman nearby and they had been attacked and one soldier was killed. Kiari's son had also been shot and the other two Islanders had escaped to safety.¹⁷³ Felix and his mother went out into the night searching desperately in the tangled roots by the shore to see if they could find him, but finally they had to stop and wait for morning light. Early the next day they found his body, floating in the mangroves.¹⁷⁴

Kiari Yaoch lost a second son in the war, not from an American air attack, but as a result of the ruthless behaviour with which the Japanese responded to the demands placed upon them by the American bombing campaign. The immense burden the raids placed on the Japanese caused them to make greater demands on Palauans. The low morale of the troops and their own desperate situation meant that Japanese concern for the welfare of Palauans decreased.

Before the Yaoch family left Airai for Ngchesar, Louis, who had been injured while out collecting coconuts, developed a serious fever. Kiari pleaded with the Japanese to let them stay a little longer until the boy was stronger, but they refused.¹⁷⁵ When the family reached their destination Louis was extremely weak. Felix remembers there was no medical help available and little food to give Louis to build up his strength. All they could do was watch in anguish as he "just wasted away".¹⁷⁶

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The war placed enormous pressure on existing Palauan food resources and brought about a severe famine on Babeldaob. The Japanese reacted to starvation and the incessant air raids by forcing Islanders to work harder to provide for the war effort. Harsh treatment inspired a large number of Chamorros, living on Babeldaob, to escape to American ships anchored near Ngarchelong.¹⁷⁷ In mid December 1944, a Palauan

¹⁷³Ibid.

¹⁷⁴Kiari Yaoch.

¹⁷⁵Ibid.

¹⁷⁶Father Felix Yaoch

¹⁷⁷See Higuchi, "War in Palau..." in White (ed.), p. 152.

named Joseph Tellei (Oikawasang), and his wife Josefa, joined more Chamorros as they fled from Babeldaob in "three large boats". They made their way in the pitch black of night to an American ship where they were taken aboard.¹⁷⁸ Joseph and his wife were taken to Angaur.¹⁷⁹

In May 1945, a Palauan man called Itpik was working in a fishing group for the Japanese soldiers. He knew of Joseph Tellei's daring escape, but he was also aware that since then the Japanese had increased their security programmes to prevent further violations.¹⁸⁰ Wartime conditions were becoming more severe, the Japanese more demanding and he was always hungry. He and some of the disgruntled Japanese soldiers with whom he worked decided to try and make their way to Peleliu. They went by boat from Aimeliik and approached a US destroyer anchored off Peleliu. They made surrender flags by tying their loincloths to bamboo poles. The ship "put a searchlight up" and then took the men into custody.¹⁸¹

Itpik was taken to the US Headquarters on Peleliu by jeep. He was amazed to see the "many cars and tents" and it "seemed [to him] that more than 10,000 soldiers were there".¹⁸² At the headquarters he was asked why he had fled from Babeldaob. Itpik answered that "We did not have any food in our place."¹⁸³

During further interrogation by intelligence officers, Itpik said that American napalm bombing had destroyed potato crops. Intelligence reported after questioning Itpik that

the burning of Japanese gardens has meant the confiscation by the Japanese of potatoes grown by the natives in their own areas, [and that] native fields have been inadvertently burned by napalm...This

¹⁷⁸Joseph Tellei, (M 1902) : WH Interview 27 March 1985 in Higuchi, *Micronesians and the Pacific War : Interviews...*

¹⁷⁹Joseph Tellei became an important informant and helper for John Useem during his time on Angaur. See Chapter Two and John Useem.

¹⁸⁰Higuchi, "War in Palau..." in White (ed.), p. 152.

¹⁸¹Itpik Martin Ruwutei, (M 1920) : WH Interview 11 April 1985 in Higuchi, *Micronesians and the Pacific War : Interviews...*

¹⁸²Ibid.

¹⁸³Ibid.

was caused by the fact that these native gardens border on the south, on some Japanese fields cultivated by soldiers.¹⁸⁴

These were certainly not the only "native" fields to be destroyed by American air raids.¹⁸⁵ There was a fine line between what were Japanese and what were Palauan fields as the Japanese, in their desperation, claimed almost all farms as their own as well as forcing Palauans to establish and tend farms for Japanese use.

The actions of the Japanese in seizing Palauan farms or stealing from them, coupled with the destruction wrought by air raids, meant that there was little cultivated food left for the Islanders. People began to rely on whatever edible plants, roots, leaves and marine life they could find. The lack of food was widespread and people in all provinces suffered from starvation. Jonathon Emul remembered that "life was miserable" then. There was "almost no food" anywhere. He noticed that the east coast still had very limited supplies of taro, while on the west coast there was

no more food, no more taro, no more tapioca, almost no food except the sea. We had to go catch fish and then you eat fish, but for almost one year there was no food, really, no rice, no nothing so we had to eat leaves...We became so hungry that you find a piece of coconut you have to crack it and divide it depending on how many people you have in the family. We had to dig big banana trunk and cook it. We had some trees growing in the mangrove, called *denges*. They have a slender fruit, really hard. It's edible but tastes very bitter - that we cooked to supplement our daily meal - because no more coconuts, no more nothing.¹⁸⁶

In Aimeliik, Rose Kebekol found that as supplies of taro and tapioca ran out, she had to travel further to collect whatever food she could for her parents and her own small children. They began to eat the fruit from trees in the mangrove, as well as banana roots and other bitter fruits that had to be cooked and then soaked before they could be eaten.¹⁸⁷ Further south in Airai, Rose Adelbai also remembers eating a bitter

¹⁸⁴Report on the Interrogation of Native Civilian Internee I.Pik (Native of Babelthuap), 30 May 1945. in *War Diary MAG 11*.

¹⁸⁵Squadron records mention numerous instances of napalming gardens and farms. No indication was given as to whether they were Japanese or "native" farms. The pilots had no way of ascertaining their ownership. See *War Diaries VMF 121 & 122*.

¹⁸⁶Jonathon Emul.

¹⁸⁷Rose Kebekol. Fruit of the oriental mangrove (*Bruguiera gymnorhiza*) is referred to by Palauans as *denges*. The bitter fruit Rose mentions could be the bitter yam (*Dioscorea bulbifera*) called *belloi* by Palauans. See Karen Nero, "Time of Famine..." in White & Lindstrom (ed), p. 145 n.

fruit, like a potato, which was really not edible and could be poisonous. After cooking, it was sliced up and soaked in water for two days, to allow the bitterness to leach out.¹⁸⁸ Other people remember gathering the usually untouched and inedible giant taro the leaves of the mangrove trees and old coconuts that had fallen to the ground and started to grow. Others caught small crabs, shrimps and a few fish from the streams.¹⁸⁹ People began to eat things they would never have considered to be food.¹⁹⁰

Dengelei Saburo believes that

those who faced the most famine crisis were those people from Angaur and Peleliu who came up [to Babeldaob] and since they had no land, and they had nothing over here, they had to steal from the soldiers or eat [from] those trees in the mangrove, or banana tree roots, that are not edible.¹⁹¹

One woman from Peleliu who stayed with relatives in Ngaraard lived almost entirely on *denges* collected from the mangroves and the "poisonous fruits that we would have to soak in water".¹⁹² Tutii Ngirutoi, a Peleliuan also in refuge at Ngaraard, recalls even eating lizards.¹⁹³ When asked about the famine, Mongami Kelmal, a Kayangel man who spent the war trapped on Babeldaob, lowered his head, embarrassed at how hungry and desperate he had been during that time.¹⁹⁴

Tosiwo Nakamura, although only a young boy during the war, remembers seeing other children, mainly those belonging to civilian Japanese and Koreans, growing ill and "dying of hunger". He saw that "gradually their face puffed out and their belly got big" and soon after they died.¹⁹⁵ Palauan children also began to die of

¹⁸⁸Rose Adelbai.

¹⁸⁹See numerous interviews including Augusta Ramarui & Melii Kemaem, Mengesebuuch Yalap, Mongami Kelmal, Father Felix Yaoch, Wilhelm Rengiil, Ngkeruker Salii, Fumio Rengiil and Tutii Ngirutoi.

¹⁹⁰Augusta Ramarui.

¹⁹¹Dengelei Saburo.

¹⁹²Woman, Peleliu (1927).

¹⁹³Tutii Ngirutoi.

¹⁹⁴Mongami Kelmal (M 1926).

¹⁹⁵Tosiwo Nakamura (M 1938) : KRW Interview 31 October 1990, Malakal, Palau.

hunger. Ngkeruker Salii's sister lost her five year old daughter because there was just not enough sustenance available to prevent her from becoming ill.¹⁹⁶ Ascension Ngelmas' two year old baby also died of starvation during the war.¹⁹⁷ Although Palauan mothers breastfed for as long as they could¹⁹⁸ or chewed up food themselves to make it edible for babies and infants¹⁹⁹, Palauan children still died of malnutrition.

Children were not the only victims of the famine. Ascension Ngelmas' father died from lack of food after the Japanese prevented the family from going to their farm to collect taro.²⁰⁰ Jonathon Emul's mother died of sickness brought on by starvation. He feels that if the war had continued beyond the year, "it would have wiped out the entire population of the west coast".²⁰¹

Temel Ngirchorachel, living in Aimeliik on bitter roots and leaves, was angry and distressed about the differences between the way Palauans were forced to live and how Japanese seemed to survive. While Palauans "only ate leaves, chewed leaves, the Japanese ate rice".²⁰² Tosiwo Nakamura, who was part Japanese, recalls when there were no longer any supplies of rice at all and he ate only coconuts and leaves. Regardless of this, he and his brothers tried to keep their pet dog alive by feeding it whatever tiny scraps they could spare. One day some Japanese soldiers came and told the boys that they needed the dog to guard their camp. They took the animal away and to Tosiwo's horror, after a few days, they killed and ate it.²⁰³

As the war continued the Japanese gradually became more and more desperate in their quest for food. Their supplies of rice and canned goods quickly dwindled.

¹⁹⁶Ngkeruker Salii.

¹⁹⁷Ascension Ngelmas.

¹⁹⁸Saruang Bekemekmad breastfed her youngest boy until he was three years of age as it was the only reliable source of food for him.

¹⁹⁹Dr. Minoru Ueki.

²⁰⁰Ascension Ngelmas.

²⁰¹Jonathon Emul.

²⁰²Temel Ngirchorachel.

²⁰³Tosiwo Nakamura.

Storage depots were targeted, and on some occasions, destroyed by American bombing²⁰⁴ and soldiers had little idea about how to live off the jungle. Felix Yaoch saw "a lot of starvation" amongst the soldiers. On some occasions he would go from one village to another in search of food and he would see soldiers on the roads,

and a lot of them have already collapsed under the load they were carrying, eyes bulging, and they ask for food and when you give them food, they cannot swallow it, they just stay there to die.²⁰⁵

Minoru Ueki, who was recruited to farm for the soldiers, watched them arrive at harvest time.

First time when they came they were still strong. They were able to carry all the sweet potatoes - mostly sweet potatoes were our crop. They were able to carry them home. And after, days went and when they came they were all thin and very malnourished. They could hardly carry their share.²⁰⁶

As the Japanese soldiers' situation became more hopeless, their demands on the Palauans increased. From Japanese sources, Higuchi established that in April 1945, Japanese soldiers on Babeldaob were only receiving 1000 calories per day. This was to be supplemented by vegetables to make a total of 1,500.²⁰⁷ It is important to note that this is what the Japanese *claim* was the daily calorie intake of their soldiers. As so many were starving, it is unlikely that they were receiving as much as 1,500 calories, which is considered to be the necessary daily minimum to maintain normal functioning. Even on 1000 calories soldiers would not have starved to death, as they did.²⁰⁸ A Japanese POW interrogated by Americans stated that in March 1945 there was only two

²⁰⁴See various entries in *War Diary VMF 122*. For example see Monday, 11 December 1944 - attacking warehouses, Tuesday, 19 December 1944 - bombing Mizuho "supply and distribution district" and Tuesday 3 July 1945 - bombing attack on area reported by POW to "contain supplies of various sorts".

²⁰⁵Father Felix Yaoch.

²⁰⁶Dr. Minoru Ueki.

²⁰⁷Wakako Higuchi, "Micronesians and the Pacific War : The Palauans" in Ballendorf, Shuster & Higuchi, p. 91

²⁰⁸For example, 1,500 calories was established to be the necessary daily minimum by the US Army in its zone of occupation in Austria in late 1945. At that time most Austrians were surviving on only 800 calories per day. See Paul Walter, *"No Country but the War" : Austria Under Occupation, 1945-55* (Honours Thesis, History Department, University of Adelaide 1985) pp. 11-12.

weeks supply of rice left for his unit. He did not know about any other available stores. His daily issue was always limited to "either rice or sweet potato".²⁰⁹

Wilhelm Rengiil could see that the Japanese had more trouble than the Palauans in finding local foods to supplement their diet. The Islanders at least knew where to fish, what fruits and roots were edible and what were not, while the soldiers often had little idea. He recalls that although the Palauans were suffering,

we were doing much better than the Japanese soldiers because local people know how to find food ourselves, they don't. And they [the soldiers] try everything lizard...snake, rats they would eat, because of shortage of food. And right after World War Two, when they [the Americans] came we took them to the place where we see piles and piles of bones, soldiers who starved during the war.²¹⁰

Mongami Kelmal remembers that the Japanese soldiers told him "Don't be afraid, we are going to win the war, so we are going to protect you".²¹¹ However it became clear that the Japanese could hardly feed and sustain *themselves*, so most could not really care about the conditions under which the Palauans were living.²¹² The Palauans, however, were valuable to the Japanese for other reasons - because of how much labour and food they could provide. Islanders all over Babeldaob were forced to work on farms and at other tasks to produce food for Japanese consumption. Women and men were recruited to labour on farms for the Japanese. In many cases they were forced to work out in the open where they were in great danger from air attacks. For example, in May 1945, a group of planes from VMF 121 led by Lieutenant Thompson, "strafed approximately sixty (60) Japanese in gardens, killing an estimated fifty per cent of them".²¹³ Sometimes pilots made strafing runs specifically because they had seen people out in the open. On Sunday, 5 August 1945, a division from VMF 122, on a sweep across central and northern Babeldaob, decided to cross the island a second

²⁰⁹*War Diary MAG 11*, Report of an Interrogation of POW 9-11 May 1945.

²¹⁰Wilhelm Rengiil.

²¹¹Mongami Kelmal.

²¹²Woman, Peleliu.

²¹³*War Diary VMF 121*, 5 May 1945.

time, to "make another strafing pass...where we had seen Japanese working in the fields".²¹⁴ As the Japanese constantly used Islanders as farm labourers, it is quite possible that these "Japanese" were Palauans.

American attacks on farms became so regular that the Japanese laid out shelters or holes in the ground around some of the bigger gardens. Alfonso Oiterong remembers these were called *takochubo* (literally 'octopus holes') and were about three or four feet deep. People were reasonably safe if they dived into these when the planes came over, until the gunners altered the angle of their shots. The planes began to make high angle diving attacks, firing straight down into the holes, so that many people were hurt or killed.²¹⁵

Despite these dangers, Tutii Ngirutoi was moved from Ngaraard to Ngarchelong to work for the soldiers, clearing coconut trees and preparing the land for more farms. Tutii did what he was told, even if he did not understand why, because he felt at that time that he "belonged to the Japanese". The Japanese "abused [them] a lot" and Tutii was often afraid.²¹⁶ School age boys were also recruited into groups to work for the soldiers. Minoru Ueki farmed with other boys, "producing for the soldiers". While they were working they were given meagre rations or nothing at all, so in many cases people would have to

run away from them, hide at night and run away to their village, have some food and then come back. Some, they just left and never went back because of the hardship, and the soldiers were looking for them...if we were caught we would be severely punished.²¹⁷

Wilhelm Rengiil was "forced" by the military to work "almost twenty four hours a day and seven days a week". His tasks included carrying rations, fishing for the soldiers and producing salt. Day and night he cut firewood, tended the fire and boiled seawater -

²¹⁴War Diary VMF 122, Sunday 5 August 1945.

²¹⁵Alfonso Oiterong. For example of high angle dive attack see *Aircraft Action Report VMF 121*, 26 January 1945.

²¹⁶Tutii Ngirutoi.

²¹⁷Dr. Minoru Ueki.

a gallon can full of salt, to produce that we had to boil 18 fifty gallon drums of salt water...and it would have to boil day and night just to get a gallon and distribute that gallon of salt to all the military units.²¹⁸

Other Palauans also worked long hours collecting or carrying food for the Army. Baiei Babul worked seven days a week collecting coconuts and other foodstuffs for the soldiers. About once a week he or others would travel within Ngaraard or walk up to Ngarchelong to find food, both for the soldiers and for themselves. The Japanese were very strict about any kind of movement.

They would give us like a small bamboo stick with a number for each person, like a licence or an ID card so that they would know how many people went to Ngarchelong to get some food. One soldier would go there with them and come back.²¹⁹

Baiei did not always have to travel as far as Ngarchelong to collect food. As he had relatives in Ngkeklau in Ngaraard, he also went there once a week to gather food. He always carried his identification.

The licence that we had, if a Japanese soldier would find us we would have to show it to him so that he didn't think that you are a spy or somebody who tried to run away, because if you don't have that number you would have to be investigated. They would have to bring you to the centre and ask questions...No-one would ever dare lose it.²²⁰

Ascension Ngelmas was permitted to travel from Airai to Melekeok by boat to collect food from her older sister's farm. The soldiers often used the family's boat to transport men and supplies so Ascension was allowed to "get on and go to Melekeok". She always had to carry "a permit", which she had to get from one of the officers before she was able to go.

There were watchmen or policemen all over Babeldaob so I would have to show the permit with the number to every one of them when I went anywhere.²²¹

²¹⁸Wilhelm Rengiil.

²¹⁹Baiei Babul.

²²⁰Ibid.

²²¹Ascension Ngelmas. These watchmen included Japanese soldiers and Palauans recruited by the military to work as policemen.

The soldiers would only allow people in Ngchesar to go out and gather food if they first went to the soldiers' camp and requested a "pass". Dengelei Saburo recalls that people had to have

a pass with a number on it, and that was only for us to go out and farm and take some food for ourselves, gather some coconuts, and then go back to the jungle into the caves.²²²

In Melekeok, Direou Orrukei remembers that people were not permitted to go out and collect food by themselves at all. They had to go at night and were constantly guarded by soldiers, so

whenever we were hungry we would ask the soldiers to accompany us for about 30 minutes to the taro patch...It was very dark and we couldn't see anything so if we wanted to get a taro you would just stick your hand in and feel the taro itself and try to use a knife to cut it so you would not cut yourself. And then for 30 minutes they would be watching and we would be trying to get as much as we could in that time...and that was the only way we could get food.²²³

Pastor and Mrs. Fey were only allowed to go and collect produce from their own gardens once every two or three weeks, when the Japanese gave them permission. They weren't able to take very much because the Japanese always rushed them, yelling for them to "hurry up".²²⁴

As well as gathering food for their own families, Palauan women were often recruited to collect, carry and prepare food for the soldiers. Saruang Bekemekmad gathered crops for the soldiers' use and walked to their camps every day to cook for them. Before the loss of Angaur and Peleliu, when there were still supplies of rice, she and other women would cook quantities of it, put it into "big barrels" and it would be sent out to Japanese ships. As food became more scarce, Saruang was required to collect coconuts for the military. Soldiers would also come to where she lived in the jungle and "force us to give them food".²²⁵

²²²Dengelei Saburo.

²²³Direou Orrukei.

²²⁴Pastor Wilhelm Fey.

²²⁵Saruang Bekemekmad.

Skasuk Skang remembers that a lot of people in Ngaraard used to walk all the way to either Melekeok or Ngardmau to get food and bring it back to those soldiers who were starving to death.²²⁶

These trips took many hours and often compelled Palauans to be out in the open during periods of bombing and strafing. The Japanese had coerced Skasuk and her family into moving from their homes in Ngarchelong down into refuge in Ngaraard, so Skasuk often travelled at night to Ngarchelong "to harvest food from our own gardens". The soldiers would take the people back by canoe. The Islanders were expected to give most of the taro, tapioca and sweet potatoes they had collected to the military and Skasuk and other women often went to the soldiers' camp to cook the produce.²²⁷

Obechou Delutaach took refuge in Ngaraard after being evacuated from Peleliu. Once a month the soldiers there drafted her and a number of other women to carry supplies from Ngaraard to other military units stationed in Ngardmau.

So we would have to walk all the way to Ngardmau to deliver the food for the soldiers and then go home. I had no idea how far it was because at the time there was no particular path so we would have to climb hills, go over, go under, while we also had to make sure that the food is not going to get spoiled. When we went in the evening we had to hurry there before daytime comes because the planes are going to start coming.²²⁸

The loads were often heavy and the women would need to rest. They were always in a hurry because they needed to reach Ngardmau before the sun rose.

If we did not reach Ngardmau before daylight comes we would have to find a place to stay and wait the whole day for the shooting and everything to clear and then four or five o' clock we would have to journey on.²²⁹

During late 1944 and the early months of 1945, Ngardmau was a regular target for bombing raids on enemy installations, supply and ammunition dumps.²³⁰ It was

²²⁶Skasuk Skang. Both these trips would be about 10 miles each way.

²²⁷Ibid.

²²⁸Obechou Delutaach.

²²⁹Ibid.

²³⁰*War Diary MAG 11* - October 1944-February 1945. Also see Appendix B.

also included in general day and night strafing and bombing sweeps over Babeldaob, so Obechou's monthly journey was very dangerous.²³¹

Earlier in the war Obechou remembers that the Japanese warned Palauans not to go out in the open during the daytime as they would make themselves clear targets for American planes.²³² However, as the Japanese became more desperate in their search for food they became less concerned with the safety of Palauans.²³³ Skesuk felt that at first the Japanese were "nice...kind people",

but right after the Marianas people left Ngardmel²³⁴ that's when they started being cruel to us. That's when we had to go look for food at night. For me I had an older sister who was married to a soldier so she told us to look for coconuts to make oil out of them to give to the soldiers to make them easy on us. The coconut oil is what the soldiers would use to fry food.²³⁵

Palauans often had to accept the demands of the Japanese in order to "make them easy" on the Islanders. Alfonso Oiterong worked for the soldiers as a policeman, overseeing Palauan farms and checking on people in Aimeliik. He learned to expect harsh treatment from the Japanese, but also discovered how to avoid physical beatings.

They were a bit strict, they beat you and if you don't do, they beat you and force you to do. But it became so common...that you know that if you don't do this or that, you get a spanking. So we try not to get spanked. I got bawled out and forced to do things...[but] I never got spanked by a Japanese.²³⁶

Mengesebuuch Yalap felt that times were very difficult for all Islanders and everyone had to be careful.

²³¹See *War Diary MAG 11*. When "hunting was poor" elsewhere, Ngardmau was a regular and favoured target for "a thorough strafing". *War Diary VMF 122*, Friday 24 November 1944.

²³²Obechou Delutaach.

²³³KRW Interviews with Palauans Oct-Nov. 1990.

²³⁴Most of the two hundred Chamorros living on Babeldaob escaped to Americans ships and then to Peleliu in late 1944 and early 1945. See Higuchi, "War in Palau..." in White (ed.), p. 152.

²³⁵Skesuk Skang. A woman from Peleliu in refuge at Ngaraard recalls that many women about her age (17 years) were recruited by the Japanese and worked seven days a week making coconut oil for the soldiers. *Woman, Peleliu* (1927).

²³⁶Alfonso Oiterong. It was common for Japanese officers to strike or even punch lower-ranking soldiers "on the merest pretext". See Zeitz, p. 127.

It was hard for us and hard for the [Palauan] policemen too because they were afraid because if they didn't do it...it was like an errand to do, and if they didn't do it they would get killed and if we went against the Palauan policemen we would be in trouble too.²³⁷

For most Palauans there was punishment enough in the hardship of being forced to work on farms for the Japanese, producing food which they would never be allowed to touch. When asked how she felt about the Japanese during the war, Rose Adelbai answered that she hated being so "very poor" and having to "face famine":

The Japanese would tell us to make gardens or farms. The parents are supposed to make the farms for the soldiers. The father of the house would have to make the biggest farm and the mother a smaller one. One farm per head for the soldiers. Even if you had a three year old he would have to have a farm right there for the soldiers. So five members of the family would have to make five farms. We could not work during daytime, only supposed to work at night time.²³⁸

The food was "only for the soldiers".²³⁹ The family would not be allowed to take anything. Mengesebuuch Yalap remembers being compelled to establish and cultivate farms "only for the soldiers". While Palauans harvested crops for the Japanese, they themselves ate giant taro and the roots of banana trees. As soon as rows of crops were planted during the night, soldiers would claim them by "putting down a stick with the name, saying that this certain part belongs to some soldier".²⁴⁰ Mesubed also recalls planting food, harvesting it and distributing it entirely to the Japanese, "none for the Palauans. It was only for the soldiers".²⁴¹

Rose Kebekol found that sometimes, although the soldiers would conscript the Islanders to make farms, they would not allow them to be involved in the harvest at all, to ensure that the Japanese would obtain the entire crop. Troops often set up their camps near the farm and they told the Palauans that they could not

²³⁷Mengesebuuch Yalap. Baiei Babul knew that the task of the Palauan policemen was to "investigate people" but he had no bad feelings against them. He "didn't think anything of them".

²³⁸Rose Adelbai.

²³⁹Ibid.

²⁴⁰Mengesebuuch Yalap.

²⁴¹Mesubed.

harvest whatever we planted because if we did the Americans would be able to spot their houses. It was their way of keeping us out and away from the farms. When harvest time comes, the Japanese soldiers would harvest it themselves.²⁴²

On other occasions the Japanese would order people to move to a certain area and establish new farms. Then, around the time that the sweet potato or other crop was ready for harvest, the Islanders were told that Japanese would be moving into the area. They were commanded to leave and the soldiers "would just go in and harvest the sweet potato".²⁴³ In Ngchesar, Augusta Ramarui found that the Japanese even claimed as their own the established Palauan taro patches and gardens. When people planted new farms for their own use, the Japanese would move in and take them over too. Many Islanders had no option but to steal from their own lands or, as Augusta recalls, they had to

move somewhere else or stand guard or some steal and say that they steal for the soldiers, protectors of our island. My father was a hard worker and we have very big coconut plantation but we were not allowed to take them so we steal. At night we go there and we steal...because of the soldiers. We had no choice.²⁴⁴

Others were too frightened to take anything. Rose Adelbai remembers that "even our own gardens, we wouldn't touch them or even the coconuts that would fall on the ground, we would not touch".²⁴⁵

In Ngeremenglui, Tibedakl Olblai was forced to farm for the Japanese but she remembers that "was not enough" for the soldiers, so they would "even steal farms from us, our own personal ones and when we would go to take crops from our own farms, they would beat us".²⁴⁶ Mengesebuuch Yalap "did not like Japanese at that time very much" because not only would they take control of Palauan farms, they would also claim coconut trees as their own.

²⁴²Rose Kebekol.

²⁴³Dr. Anthony Polloi.

²⁴⁴Augusta Ramarui.

²⁴⁵Rose Adelbai.

²⁴⁶Tibedakl Olblai.

Even the coconut trees in the jungle that did not belong to anybody or the coconut trees that belonged to us, we would even have to steal because they would nail a sign on them saying that this coconut tree and the coconuts on it belong to this one group of soldiers.²⁴⁷

If Palauans tried to take these coconuts, the Japanese would beat them with clubs.²⁴⁸ Yet many Japanese stole regularly from the Islander's lands. A Ngermid woman in refuge in Airai remembers that once the Japanese began to run out of supplies they "began stealing crops - tapioca, taro and coconuts". When Palauans went to collect food from their gardens, "there was nothing there".²⁴⁹

The gardens that Pastor Fey and his wife had "worked hard" to establish and keep were also ransacked by Japanese soldiers. As soon as they saw that the crops were ready for harvest they came in to take whatever they wanted. "It was there and the Japanese used it too. They did not care if it was our food. It was food. They saw sweet potatoes. They took them."²⁵⁰

Jonathon Emul worked for the Japanese military police during the war. He recalls that there was a constant stealing by both Japanese and Palauans. The soldiers would plunder Palauan gardens taking taro and tapioca and the Islanders could not retaliate because the Japanese had guns and the Islanders were unarmed.²⁵¹ With their crops expropriated by the Japanese, Palauans would then be compelled to steal from their own or from Japanese gardens.

The Japanese applied similar methods to fishing harvests. Mereb Eruang was sent out to fish at night for the Japanese and on his return the soldiers took all the fish. If he was to have any fish for himself and his family, Mereb would have to steal from his own catch before he turned it over to the Japanese. He remembered it was always the same, "we had to hide the ones that we took home".²⁵²

²⁴⁷Ibid.

²⁴⁸Mengesebuuch Yalap.

²⁴⁹Woman, Ngermid.

²⁵⁰Pastor Wilhelm Fey.

²⁵¹Jonathon Emul.

²⁵²Mereb Eruang.

In Ngaraard, teenage boys would go out fishing to provide food for their families, but if they happened to be spotted by soldiers on their way back to their shelters, the soldiers "would take the fish".²⁵³ This was also common practice in Aimeliik. Temel Ngirchorachel went out fishing at the command of the soldiers and regularly had his entire catch taken from him, so he developed the habit of hiding the bigger fish so that he could keep them and only handed over the small ones to the military.²⁵⁴

A Japanese soldier who escaped to Peleliu and surrendered to the Americans told intelligence officers that "natives" were sent to fish "under guard of Japanese soldiers, who take a portion of the catch".²⁵⁵ The experience of Palauans shows that this was a distortion of the truth.

The indiscriminate stealing by the Japanese and their increasing brutality led Palauans to develop ways to protect themselves, using quiet and clever strategies of resistance. Just as Temel learned to hide some of his catch, other Palauans worked out ways to prevent or hinder Japanese forays into their farms and gardens. Dengelei Saburo and her family used an effective method to protect their tapioca crop when it was ready for harvest. By cutting off the stems above the ground, the plants were hidden, so

when the Japanese soldiers came, they didn't know anything, they thought there was nothing underneath so they would not do anything to it.²⁵⁶

Some Palauans began to realize that the Japanese were 'using them'. They made them plant up farms and then moved them away when the crops were ready for harvest. In retaliation Anthony Polloi and his family

²⁵³Ngkeruker Salii.

²⁵⁴Temel Ngirchorachel.

²⁵⁵*War Diary MAG 11*, Report of Interrogation of POW 9-11 May 1945.

²⁵⁶Dengelei Saburo.

plant[ed] poisonous tapioca - tapioca that has cyanide - we planted those things between them [the ordinary tapioca plants]. You can have the plant with cyanide. Welcome Japanese!²⁵⁷

Tosiwo Nakamura remembers that some Palauans, when they put in a new cassava crop, surrounded "the perimeter of the garden [with] poisonous ones...and some soldiers they start to get them and they die".²⁵⁸ However, one morning, one of the little boys with whom Tosiwo used to play started to vomit uncontrollably and later he died. It seemed the boy's family had unknowingly taken some of the poisoned crops from one of the baited gardens, cooked it and fed their children. Tosiwo's parents warned him never to accept any food from their friends, as they could not be sure where it came from.²⁵⁹

A group of women who had gone out to collect taro were returning to their shelters, carrying their small harvest in baskets on their heads. They were approached by Japanese soldiers who, at gunpoint, forced them to hand over all the taro they had. This happened on a number of occasions, so the women, in retaliation, deliberately filled their baskets with poisonous taro. The Japanese soldiers held them up again and the women gave up their produce. After eating the poisonous taro the soldiers became ill and their mouths blistered.²⁶⁰

In such ways, Palauans were able to use the ignorance of the Japanese against them, tricking the soldiers and protecting themselves. However, for many, the impulse to use these methods was hampered by a mixture of loyalty towards their 'protectors' and fear of the retaliation of their 'guards'.²⁶¹ Many Palauans felt it was important to avoid angering the Japanese. Anthony Polloi remembers soldiers with guns coming to his family's shelter to beg for food. His mother would always provide a hot meal,

²⁵⁷Dr. Anthony Polloi.

²⁵⁸Tosiwo Nakamura.

²⁵⁹Ibid.

²⁶⁰Story told to Julie Tellei. Conversation with KRW, 22 November 1990.

²⁶¹Augusta Ramarui and Melii Kemaem spoke of the close relationship between fear and loyalty in their feelings for the Japanese during the war.

however small, to make certain there would not be any trouble.²⁶² Other Palauans at times felt sorry for individual Japanese soldiers. Benged Sechewas saw two men who were obviously "very hungry" begin to steal taro from her family's plot. She knew that if they ate that kind of taro raw, they would make themselves very ill, so "we gave them advice not to eat it".²⁶³ She might also have feared being blamed for poisoning the soldiers.

Fear of the soldiers was widespread, even amongst those Islanders who worked for them. Jonathon Emul was too frightened to risk stealing food from the soldiers. He expected strong punishment and believed that they would "execute people who steal food."²⁶⁴ Many other Palauans were extremely anxious about the possibility of execution by the Japanese. Mereb Eruang "hated" the Japanese for taking the fish he risked his life to get. However, he did not discuss his feelings: "we did not spread it around because if we did we would be killed".²⁶⁵ During the war Mengesebuuch Yalap heard of a number of executions carried out by the Japanese. It was rumoured that they had killed a number of Spanish Catholic priests and had also blindfolded and then beheaded a group of Palauan and Yapese lepers.²⁶⁶ The death of the Catholic missionaries was not just a story. On 18 September 1944, twenty soldiers had been involved in the murder of six foreign civilians, four of whom had been missionaries in Koror. They had also killed another foreign civilian and his family on Babeldaob.²⁶⁷ All were suspected of spying for the Americans. During the war, Wilhelm Rengiil had heard of people being executed because they were considered to be spies, supplying information to the enemy.²⁶⁸

²⁶²Dr. Anthony Polloi.

²⁶³Benged Sechewas.

²⁶⁴Jonathon Emul.

²⁶⁵Mereb Eruang.

²⁶⁶Mengesebuuch Yalap and Woman, Ngermid. Japanese in the Marshalls and Marianas had executed both indigenous Chamorros and Marshallese and some European pastors. See Peattie, pp. 301-302.

²⁶⁷Jiro Nakamura (M 1920) : WH Interview 12 October 1986, Nagano, Japan in Higuchi, *Interviews with Former...*, pp. 156-157.

²⁶⁸Wilhelm Rengiil.

Pastor Fey heard that a number of Catholic missionaries had "lost their heads" and felt that he was also "close to it". On one occasion he and his wife were taken into custody by the Japanese.

At the beginning of December, I don't know the date, 8th or 9th, they took my wife and me into headquarters for questions...the story had come to the Japanese, to their head [that] we had given radio information to the American ships who were around in these days.²⁶⁹

At the time Fey was not told why he had been arrested, but he knew he was in serious trouble. He boldly told the Japanese officer in charge,

"I am ready to die. I am not afraid to die. You'll do me a favour if you kill me, but it will not be a favour to you because people at home they will ask - Where are the Feys? - and then what will you say".²⁷⁰

However, it was not Fey's threat that influenced the Japanese commander, but another Japanese man who interceded on their behalf. He was a Christian and had attended Fey's services and therefore knew them well. He explained that although Fey was "not Japanese minded", he was still "a Japanese friend".²⁷¹

Not only people suspected of supplying information to the enemy were put to death. During interrogation of an escaped Korean, American intelligence officers learned of the execution of a group of about 40 Javanese used as forced labour in the potato fields. The workers were "closely guarded by Japanese" but in April 1945 two of these men attempted to escape. They "were shot by the Japanese in the enforced presence of the other members of the group".²⁷² It is probable that Palauans would have heard rumours about this incident and possibly others that occurred at different times.

Most Palauans feared that the Japanese were planning to execute *all* the Islanders. They sensed the increasing frustration of the Japanese, they saw and

²⁶⁹Pastor Wilhelm Fey.

²⁷⁰Ibid.

²⁷¹Ibid.

²⁷²*War Diary, MAG 11* : Report of Interrogation of POW Nishiyama, Kukei (Korean) July 1945.

experienced more brutality from the military. It was easy to believe that the Japanese only regarded the Palauans as competitors for the extremely limited supplies of food. A woman from Ngermid, who stayed in Airai during the war, remembers there was a rumour circulating that the Japanese would keep the Palauans alive for a period of time during which they would be forced to make a large number of farms. Once these were established, the soldiers would then bring all the Islanders together, take them to a large cave in Ngatpang and kill them all. She could even see the logic behind the plan, because after the farms were made, if the Palauans "stayed alive they [the Japanese] would be wasting food on them".²⁷³

Dengelei Saburo remembers that the Japanese had actually begun to dig out a large cave and it was after this that a report circulated that the Japanese

were going to put all the Palauans in, and kill all of them since we were wasting a lot of food for the Japanese soldiers...I was in Ngchesar and we were the first ones who were supposed to go inside the cave.²⁷⁴

Some Islanders who had been in Ngatpang working for the military were known to have seen the cave. One Ngermid man heard from friends that the cave had wires leading into it which were connected to bombs, which would be used to kill the Islanders.²⁷⁵ Rose Adelbai was told it was like "a very big ditch" the walls of which were reinforced with cement.²⁷⁶ Skesuk Skang learned from people returning from transporting food for the soldiers that the cave

was a big one and lights and everything were all inside, and wires for the bombs. And later on we heard that the cave was where all Palauans would be taken and we were all going to die, so everybody started crying, thinking of it.²⁷⁷

²⁷³Woman, Ngermid.

²⁷⁴Dengelei Saburo.

²⁷⁵Man, Ngermid (1919).

²⁷⁶Rose Adelbai.

²⁷⁷Skesuk Skang.

In Aimeliik, Mengesebuuch Yalap even heard that Palauans would be expected to provide their own lunches to be eaten during the journey to Ngatpang! The older men and women who had difficulty walking could stay behind with the babies, but every other able-bodied person would be expected to make his or her way to the cave.²⁷⁸ The rumour was widespread and most Palauans were aware of it.²⁷⁹ Many were very afraid, others did not know where the cave was supposed to be or whether it really existed.²⁸⁰

The Japanese dug many caves to store ammunition, vehicles and other supplies as well as to provide safe shelters for personnel.²⁸¹ In Ngatpang the main radio station operated from a cave and others nearby housed generators and other equipment.²⁸² Some of the caves were up to 30 feet deep.²⁸³ It is possible that Palauans visiting Ngatpang saw inside caves which housed such radio equipment or others storing ammunition. Additional shelters were also planned and dug, including a large cave in Ngatpang for the headquarters of the navy.²⁸⁴ Islanders witnessing such work could not know the purpose of the new caves and therefore linked their existence to reasonable fears of execution.

Benged Sechewas believes it was only because of a "blessing from God" that the Palauans were not executed in the cave at Ngatpang. However many Islanders believe that it was human intervention that saved their lives - in the form of a young and handsome Japanese officer called Yoshiyasu Morikawa. A large number of Palauans believe that Captain Morikawa was an American spy, who was able to use his influence

²⁷⁸Mengesebuuch Yalap.

²⁷⁹Nearly all the people I interviewed had heard something during the war about the cave in Ngatpang and the possibility of execution. A number learned about it after the war.

²⁸⁰Mereb Eruang.

²⁸¹*War Diary MAG 11*, Report of Interrogation of POW, 9-11 May 1945 & Report of Interrogation of Native Civilian Internee I.Pik (Native of Babelthuap), 30 May 1945.

²⁸²*War Diary MAG 11*, Report of Interrogation of POW, 9-11 May 1945.

²⁸³*Ibid.* One of these caves was described by a POW as 9' wide, 12' high and 30' deep.

²⁸⁴*Ibid.*

over the Japanese to prevent them from carrying out their planned genocide.²⁸⁵ Some Islanders state that he seemed to know when the war was going to end and was able to delay the Japanese and save the Palauans from execution.²⁸⁶

In her study of the "legend" of Morikawa, Wakako Higuchi collected Islanders' stories and compared them with the "facts" as described to her by Morikawa himself. She found many "common beliefs" about this Japanese officer among Palauans, which "taken together, form a powerful wartime legend".²⁸⁷ Morikawa was supposed have arrived in Palau suddenly and unexpectedly. Most Palauans remember seeing him during the war. They knew he was responsible for them as he would travel around the island with his men, checking on all the *hinanba*. He was handsome, taller than most Japanese and he was friendly, a "nice" man.²⁸⁸

Dengelei Saburo remembered that Morikawa always dressed in white,

all his uniforms were white, even his gloves and he had this cap for soldiers that he had on every single time. Every single day he would walk from state to state visiting people and yet nobody would ever shoot at him.²⁸⁹

Wilhelm Rengiil had also heard that Morikawa was able to walk safely from village to village without having to hide.²⁹⁰ Higuchi's interviews with Islanders echo this image. Many said that Morikawa walked about unprotected, even when American planes were strafing, but he was never hurt. The planes never shot at him.²⁹¹ This helped to reinforce the idea that he was somebody special, and that he had a relationship with the Americans which prevented them from harming him. Some Palauans believed he had a

²⁸⁵See Higuchi, "War in Palau..." in White (ed.), pp. 149-156, & also KRW Interviews with Palauans, Oct-Nov 1990.

²⁸⁶Tibedakl Olblai, Saruang Bekemekmad, Dengelei Saburo, Rose Adelbai & see also Higuchi, "War in Palau..." in White (ed.), p. 151.

²⁸⁷Higuchi, "War in Palau..." in White (ed.), p. 149. These "common beliefs" were echoed by many of the Palauans I interviewed.

²⁸⁸Tibedakl Olblai, Mereb Eruang, Alfonso Oiterong and see Higuchi, "War in Palau..." in White (ed.), pp. 149-150.

²⁸⁹Dengelei Saburo.

²⁹⁰Wilhelm Rengiil.

²⁹¹See Higuchi, "War in Palau..." in White (ed.), p. 149.

radio set up with which he communicated with the Americans. He was also said to have used a Yapese man as a messenger. This man he sent to Peleliu to make contact with American forces.²⁹²

Most Palauans recall that Morikawa was responsible for organizing Palauan farming. He travelled all over Babeldaob encouraging Islanders to "make more farms".²⁹³ Ngkeruker Salii did not see Morikawa herself, but she was aware that he

was the one who spread the word for us to plant more, as many crops as possible, because at that time we didn't know how long the war was going to be.²⁹⁴

Baiei Babul saw Morikawa when he visited Ngaraard. He remembered he was a "high officer" and he "instructed" the Islanders to "make farms" and advised them how many each family would have to establish.²⁹⁵ He also made suggestions about easier and more productive ways to farm.²⁹⁶ Some Palauans remember that Morikawa told them the war would be ending soon, but that they must still concentrate on producing more crops to feed the Japanese soldiers and themselves.²⁹⁷

Tibedakl Olblai, travelling at night with a group of other women from Peleliu, was approached by a Japanese soldier. He asked them who they were and why they were in Ngarchelong. Tibedakl explained they had been ordered by the Japanese to go from their homes in Ngaraard to Ollei, to help clean up the village. The soldier, whom they discovered was Morikawa, told them they should return quickly to their refuge in Ngaraard. He pointed across the horizon to Kayangel and told the women to look at the ships in the passage between Babeldaob and the atoll.

He told us that those are American ships. It was during the night but it seemed like it was broad daylight because of the light from the ships. And he told us that "Those are American ships and you

²⁹²Ibid.

²⁹³Man, Ngermid, Skesuk Skang, Rose Adelbai, Baiei Babul and others.

²⁹⁴Ngkeruker Salii.

²⁹⁵Baiei Babul.

²⁹⁶Saruang Bekemekmad.

²⁹⁷Mereb Eruang and Tibedakl Olblai.

people cannot stay here because...if they fire towards the shore, you're going to be killed".²⁹⁸

He advised them to return home and work at providing food for their families because the war was likely to continue for a few months. Morikawa and his companion travelled with them for some distance and he shared some small biscuits with the Palauans. Before he left he asked the women to sing a Japanese song for him, which they did. He told them that "Hearing you sing, it seems like I am home, back in Japan, entering my house and being with my wife and my children."²⁹⁹ He also told Tivedakl that when she reached home she should tell her family that the war would end soon.³⁰⁰ He said that they would have to try and survive for a few more months. Tivedakl remembers that he seemed to be protective of the Islanders and he appeared to know more about the progress of the war than other Japanese and was willing to share his feelings with Palauans.

Connecting Morikawa's task of supervising Palauan food production, his apparent concern for Palauans, and the rumour of execution, many Palauans believe it was Morikawa "who changed everything"³⁰¹ and "saved them"³⁰². They understand that he protected the Palauans by making it clear to the Japanese that Islanders were still valuable in supporting the war effort by establishing farms and cultivating food for the military. Looking back, Timothy Ngartil believes that Morikawa had heard about the planned execution and he

attempted to find a solution whereby Palauans could escape mass death and, at the same time, solve the Japanese food shortage problem. He suggested to the Japanese military officials in Palau that they postpone their extermination plans and use the natives to grow more food plants.³⁰³

²⁹⁸Tivedakl Olblai.

²⁹⁹Ibid.

³⁰⁰Ibid.

³⁰¹Rose Adelbai.

³⁰²Saruang Bekemekmad.

³⁰³Timothy Ngartil as quoted in Higuchi, "War in Palau..." in White (ed.), p. 150.

Rose Adelbai recalls that in his concern for the safety of the Islanders, he also warned people not to go to Ngatpang if they were ever ordered to do so, and he described the cave to them.³⁰⁴

Morikawa denies that there was any plan for the mass extermination of the Palauans. He says there was no reason at all for such a plan "that late in the war". At that stage, the "Islanders didn't affect us".³⁰⁵ He is bewildered at the Palauans' conviction that he was an American spy. He did arrive as the sole passenger on a military flight to Palau, which may explain the stories surrounding his strange and sudden appearance. He was an Captain, trained at the Japanese Army Officers' School and the Tokyo Field Artillery Training School. His formal education probably made him stand out from the ordinary soldiers with whom Palauans were used to associating.³⁰⁶

Morikawa's task, serving directly beneath Lieutenant General Inoue of the Japanese Headquarters in Ngatpang, was to organize the Palauans on Babeldaob in order to "counter subversive activity". After the escape of Islanders to Peleliu, the Japanese military became aware of unrest among the Palauans. They could see the increasing friction between Islanders and soldiers, particularly over the shortage of food. Morikawa was charged with the task of solving these problems and preventing any further crises. He was also responsible for suggesting and then initiating the development of the *Giyu-Kirikomi-tai* or Patriotic Shock Corps - a special group, which comprised 80 Palauan young men, trained in both the technical and spiritual aspects of Japanese combat. These men were educated in order to inculcate "rigid discipline", faith in the Japanese fighting spirit and strong loyalty to the mother country.³⁰⁷

³⁰⁴Rose Adelbai.

³⁰⁵Yoshiyasu Morikawa as quoted in Higuchi, "War in Palau..." in White (ed.), p. 155.

³⁰⁶Higuchi, "War in Palau..." in White (ed.), p. 151.

³⁰⁷Ibid. pp.153-154. Also see Higuchi, *Micronesians and the Pacific War : Interviews...* Higuchi mainly interviewed men who served in the *Giyu-Kirikomi-tai*.

Second Lieutenant Ichiro Hachisu was ordered to train the young Palauans, who were selected in two groups of forty. The programme lasted six months and included both "Education for Fighting" and "Spiritual Education".³⁰⁸ Jonas Olkeliil recalls physical training, which included climbing trees, shooting, and swimming while carrying equipment and weapons. In the evenings they learned "What spirit should soldiers have?" and "What is loyalty?"³⁰⁹ Francisco Morei remembers the training was "very hard", but he learned "many things", including how to communicate in "secret languages (pretending to be a bird, using passwords)".³¹⁰ They were also taught suicide attacks - how "to kill the enemy using body bombs".³¹¹ The men believed then (and today) that they were to be used in a counter-attack against American troops on Peleliu, but the Japanese Higuchi interviewed maintain that the training was purely to gain "spiritual control of young male Palauans".³¹² Given that Japanese troops *did* land on Peleliu and that there was a continuing infiltration of soldiers into the small islands between Peleliu and Koror, the Palauans' belief that they were to be used as invasion troops is reasonable.

To bring further control and order to other Palauans in the *hinanba* and to alleviate tension between Palauans and Japanese over soldiers stealing food and seizing farms, Captain Morikawa visited each area twice a month. He advised Palauans to obey the orders of their superiors, but he also warned Japanese officers to curb the offensive behaviour of their troops. He told Islanders to develop more and bigger farms to help with the food shortage, which was believed to be the basis of all the problems. To ensure these practices continued when he was not around he organized the Morikawa-*butai*, a group of Palauan men, some of whom were already working for

³⁰⁸Ichiro Hachisu (M 1918) : WH Interview 11 October 1986, Kashiwa, Saitama, Japan in Higuchi, *Interviews with Former...*, p. 163.

³⁰⁹Jonas Olkeliil (M 1927), WH Interview 3 March 1985 in Higuchi, *Micronesians and the Pacific War : Interviews...*

³¹⁰Francisco Morei, (M 1922), WH Interview 26 March 1985 in Higuchi, *Micronesians and the Pacific War : Interviews...*

³¹¹Jonas Olkeliil.

³¹²Higuchi, "War in Palau..."in White (ed.), pp. 153-154.

the military, to work as administrators and security officers in each area. He also appointed Japanese *shidokan* or leaders to each *hinanba*, to assist with organizing Islanders. Morning gatherings were instigated which acted both as a head count for Islanders, a preparation for the day's work, and a method for inculcating loyalty through patriotic speeches.³¹³

Jonathon Emul and Alfonso Oiterong were already working for the military when they were assigned to work for Morikawa. Emul was stationed in Aimeliik and worked for what he recognized to be "a Palauan Affairs branch of the military". He acted as a "village organizer" and remembers that his job was

to train people to become Japanese citizens, so they had to recite certain phrases by the Japanese government every morning..."I will become a whole-hearted Japanese"...I think it is more of a psychological thing, where you had to side with the Japanese and you say that you are the children of Hirohito.³¹⁴

Many Palauans still recall fragments of the phrases they were expected to recite each morning. Mengesebuuch Yalap went every morning "to a high place in the jungle" where she and other Islanders would "say our prayers to *Tenno Heika*, the Emperor of Japan". Although she was then only fifteen years old she still remembers chanting ten phrases including - "We are the sons and daughters of *Tenno Heika*" and "We are the pure-blood of Japan".³¹⁵ She remembers that it was often Morikawa himself who led the morning gathering and gave a speech about loyalty to the Japanese cause. Delirang, who spent the war in refuge on a rock island off Koror also recalls that, at about eight o'clock each morning, a Japanese soldier would make them line up and bow to the Emperor before they were assigned their daily work.³¹⁶

Part of Jonathon Emul's job was to encourage loyalty amongst the Islanders and assist in providing security. This often involved reminding Palauans to

³¹³Ibid. pp. 152-153.

³¹⁴Jonathon Emul.

³¹⁵Mengesebuuch Yalap.

³¹⁶Delirang.

"Be good, because we have people among the Japanese who are not very kind, not very good people". Many times I have to tell a neighbour to be careful so they won't get caught by the Japanese... we provided a kind of law enforcement function and training and at the same time we make sure that you are loyal to the Japanese government.³¹⁷

Alfonso Oiterong often travelled with Morikawa when he carried out his inspections in Aimeliik. Morikawa seemed to Alfonso to be "nice" and "not as aggressive as I really thought he should have been" given the huge task he was assigned to do.³¹⁸ During other times, Alfonso was sent to carry out inspections on his own, to check on people who seemed to be missing.

For example, Japanese Army Headquarters [would] call and say that some Palauan employed by the Army is gone, and they want a search to find him...so as part of it, we had the job of searching, if somebody run away.³¹⁹

He would travel to different refuges and ask people for information about the missing man and ensure that nobody else had escaped. Alfonso was aware that the Japanese were "afraid of people who run away to the Americans", and that part of Morikawa's task was to prevent such incidents.³²⁰

A strange mix of legend and fact surrounds the story of Morikawa. Palauans who were directly involved in working for the Morikawa-*butai* had more idea of its functions. Others, sensing the differing behaviour and tasks of Morikawa, began to suspect him of having some connection with the Americans. Rose Adelbai noted that he looked physically different to the ordinary Japanese. He had a "long nose", which after the war she learned to associate with people from the West, so she thinks he may have been only part-Japanese.³²¹ Other people believe he was a *nisei* from Hawaii.³²²

³¹⁷Jonathon Emul.

³¹⁸Alfonso Oiterong.

³¹⁹Ibid.

³²⁰Ibid.

³²¹Rose Adelbai.

³²²Yoshiko Ashio in Higuchi, "War in Palau..." in White (ed.), p. 150. A *nisei* is an overseas Japanese.

As Higuchi points out, one reason why the myth that Morikawa was a spy may have developed was because he seemed so different from the other Japanese. He also personally "drew a sharp distinction between himself and the other Japanese".³²³ His behaviour was more refined, kind and polite. Japanese soldiers were expected to uphold the "dignity of being Japanese" but as war conditions worsened and the famine became unbearable, men did whatever was necessary to ensure survival. Their manner contrasted strongly with that of the trained, quiet, unaggressive Captain Morikawa. Higuchi suggests that

his attitude and behavior sparked the Islanders' imagination of the other power - "strong America"....The contrasting concepts of Japanese vs American, and the reality of the general soldier's behavior, as opposed to Morikawa's, mingled in the Islander's mind. Born from within this paradox, was a light of hope - the mythical "Morikawa".³²⁴

This analysis can be taken one step further. It is possible that because the behaviour of the Japanese became so brutal and uncaring of the Islanders, it seemed to Palauans that the concerned and caring Morikawa could not possibly be Japanese. The Islanders, looking desperately for an alternative, "for hope", decided that Morikawa had to be an American, disguised as a Japanese officer. This explained his unusual looks, his different behaviour and his concern with the way of life of Palauans. As the air raids over Palau became stronger and the Japanese soldiers became weaker, it was clear to the Palauans that the Americans were powerful and were in command of the war. As an assumed American, Morikawa too was a figure of control in an environment beyond the control of Palauans. He developed and enforced ways to alleviate the famine. He seemed to know when the war would end, and he was therefore able to delay the inhuman Japanese execution plan until it was too late to carry it out. As they lost their faith in the Japanese, many Palauans began to hope that they

³²³Higuchi, "War in Palau..."in White (ed.), p. 156.

³²⁴Ibid.

could be saved by such a powerful American.³²⁵ With his responsibility toward Islanders, Morikawa began to fill the image.

This was not the image that the Japanese wanted Palauans to have of the enemy. The Japanese had spread graphic stories about what the Americans would do to Palauans if enemy forces invaded Babeldaob, or if Islanders made the mistake of surrendering to Americans. Many Japanese themselves feared capture because they believed that the Americans "mistreat prisoners of war".³²⁶ The most common belief amongst Palauans was that Americans would tie a person between two horses, one leg secured to each animal. The horses would then be whipped so that they ran in two different directions, tearing the prisoner's body in halves.³²⁷ Another rumour was that the Americans would rape all the women and kill all the men.³²⁸

As the war went on, Japanese brutality increased and Palauans became more desperate for food. The pressure of living under such intolerable conditions inspired some to try and make contact with the enemy, in spite of the risks and the vivid rumours of the terrors that might await them. This enemy was never far away. Evidence of American power surrounded the northern Palaus.

When Tivedakl Olblai visited Ngarchelong she saw a large number of American ships anchored in the Kossol Passage between Babeldaob and Kayangel. Fumio Rengiil thought that the lights from the ships there looked "like a big city".³²⁹ Ships occupied the Kossol Passage throughout the long year. Kayangel atoll and the other

³²⁵Ibid. Many of the Palauans interviewed believe that Morikawa saved them and they believe he was an American spy.

³²⁶*War Diary MAG 11*, Report of Interrogation of POW 9-11 May 1945. Report notes - "The Japanese fear capture by us because of the propaganda that has been disseminated among them to the effect that we mistreat prisoners of war". There were many rumours among Japanese soldiers throughout the Pacific about the "horrific" treatment they would receive as prisoners of war. One of the worst stories was that men would be buried up to their heads and then run over by a tank or bulldozer. See Zeitz, pp. 210-11.

³²⁷KRW Interviews with Palauans, Oct-Nov 1990. Nearly everyone I interviewed had heard this story and many believed it. This story also appears in Higuchi's interviews. Rumours that Americans would torture, mutilate or dismember prisoners were common among Japanese soldiers. See Zeitz, p. 211. Such stories could easily be passed on to Palauans.

³²⁸Augusta Ramarui, Woman, Ngermid and Rose Kebekol.

³²⁹Fumio Rengiil.

tiny islands nearby had been occupied peacefully by American forces on 1 December 1944.³³⁰ There were only sixty Islanders on Kayangel and no Japanese. After reconnaissance it was decided that Kayangel would make a reasonably well protected small-boat haven, and that the three smaller unoccupied islands, with their sandy beaches and coconut palms, were suitable as a recreation area for the large number of naval forces anchored in the Kossol Passage.³³¹

Palauans also saw American ships in other places, mainly along the west coast of Babeldaob, off Ngeremenglui and Ngardmau and near Aimeliik and Airai.³³² Earlier in the war people had watched American and Japanese ships firing upon each other.³³³ Enemy ships also fired regularly at targets on Babeldaob. Mereb Eruang saw a warship anchored in the channel at Ngeremenglui. It fired at storage areas and gun emplacements on the island.³³⁴ Baiei Babul recalled a ship anchored near Ngiwal, which "shot at the island" and another harboured at Ollei, which "purposely fired" into that area.³³⁵ On one occasion he had watched a small American craft position itself near the Ollei dock. He could see Americans swimming and fishing.³³⁶ Moments later land-based Japanese guns fired on the men. The small ship retreated. Later, in retaliation, a larger American vessel returned and fired on the island.³³⁷ Alfonso Oiterong had also watched an American ship, harboured off Koror. From a vantage point on a hill he was able to see men swimming near the dock.³³⁸

³³⁰The 81st Wildcat Division Historical Committee, p. 214.

³³¹Ibid. pp. 213-214.

³³²Skasuk Skang, Baiei Babul, Mereb Eruang and others.

³³³Ascensions Ngelmas.

³³⁴Mereb Eruang.

³³⁵Baiei Babul.

³³⁶These men were probably attached to the naval forces in the Kossol Passage. As the islands around Kayangel were a recreation area for these men, they may have sailed from there down to the tip of Babeldaob.

³³⁷Ibid.

³³⁸Alfonso Oiterong.

Despite this display of American power, the Japanese tried to convince Palauans that they were still stronger. Ngkeruker Salii's husband worked for the Japanese soldiers as a policeman. His superiors continually told him that "We have more of that coming, bigger ships and more planes coming from Japan to save us, so just don't worry about it".³³⁹

Some Palauans who had watched the ships, doubted these claims and after long discussion of the dangers decided to make contact with the Americans. One woman in refuge in Airai tells of how the men of her family went to an American ship anchored near Ngeremenglui. At night the ship was always lit up so it was easy to locate. The men made up a raft out of tin and used it to float out to the vessel. They covered themselves so the Japanese could not see them if they caught sight of the raft. When they reached the ship they revealed themselves and made signals of surrender. The Americans took them aboard and they were given food and cigarettes. They had told their families to try and not worry if they did not return. There was very little communication but it was clear that American sailors were inviting the men to remain with them. The men tried to explain that they had to return to their families. They feared for their wives and children if the Japanese realized there were people missing. They knew the morning gathering was also a headcount and if everyone was not accounted for, the Japanese would start to ask questions. The Americans released the Islanders and they brought the food - flour and corned beef - back to the island. The women were extremely happy to see their husbands return safely and amazed to see all the food. They quickly buried everything. They only ever risked digging it up at night, because they knew that "if the Japanese found out, we would die".³⁴⁰

Some Islanders were able to taste American foods without risking a voyage out to the ships. Temel Ngirchorachel was often ordered to go out and fish for the Japanese. On a number of occasions he saw American ships nearby and one morning he and his fellow workers found a container floating in the mangroves. They retrieved and

³³⁹Ngkeruker Salii.

³⁴⁰Woman, Ngermid.

opened the vessel to find it filled with a white powder. They tasted the substance and found that it was edible, so they assumed it must have come from the ships. Temel now knows that the substance was powdered milk. At that time they were so hungry they were willing to try anything.³⁴¹ Fumio Rengiil remembers that after people like Temel had salvaged American food, it became a usual practise to "go around Babeldaob sea-shore and see if any food [was] thrown away" from the ships.³⁴²

From his refuge in Airai Wilhelm Rengiil looked out across "the big, blue ocean outside and its nothing but ship, warship, one after another".³⁴³ The sight of ships from "horizon to horizon" was "very scary", but it led to unexpected treasures. Wilhelm recalls,

one time, it was around 5 pm and usually we take a chance in the evening and early in the morning to go fishing, so my brothers and my cousins - there were about five of us - we went fishing and all of a sudden we saw a small thing, looked like a small drum floating up and down, so we were debating among ourselves. Our big brother said, "Don't touch, most probably it's, you know, a mine. Most probably it's one of those things that when you touch it, it explodes. So don't go near."³⁴⁴

This advice was very sensible because mines were set everywhere on Babeldaob, in the water, "along the mangrove shore"³⁴⁵, as well along many of the major paths and roads.³⁴⁶ Wilhelm however was "at that age" when he was just too intrigued and curious to leave it alone. So he waded into the water. When he got closer to the object,

it really looked like a drum...and there was a lid that can be opened , so to me, it's not going to be a mine, so I pulled it up and they were scared. They say "You fool, leave that thing!" and when I pull it to a shallow place, they came out and when you opened it, its a

³⁴¹Temel Ngirchorachel.

³⁴²Fumio Rengiil.

³⁴³Wilhelm Rengiil.

³⁴⁴Ibid.

³⁴⁵*War Diary MAG 11*, Report of Interrogation of POW Nakanrakari, Hozen & Yohena, Chiko July 1945.

³⁴⁶On 6 August 1945, aircraft from VMF 122, strafed a "floating mine" in the water near Koror and it "exploded". *War Diary VMF 122*, Monday 6 August 1945. In their interrogation of a POW in May 1945, the Americans learned that "all sizes of bombs [were] used as mines along both sides of the road" from Arimizu (Koror-Babeldaob channel) to Airai. *War Diary MAG 11*, Report of Interrogation of POW 9-11 May 1945.

container of rations! Military rations and there is small crackers and chocolate and all types of food (laughs) so we ate and we had a good time.³⁴⁷

The next morning when the boys told the other villagers and showed them what was left of the food, everyone wanted to share in the find and some said "Let's go and find some more of that." Wilhelm guessed that the drum must have been dumped or lost from one of the American warships. The Japanese had always told Palauans that the Americans were "poor" and "bad" people who because of their poverty came "to fight and take our islands". However Wilhelm remembers that

when we saw those crackers, chocolate and cigarettes and all kinds, corned beef and turkey, and all kinds, we thought among ourselves, "How come they say these people are poor? See all this food." We have never tasted, never seen this kind of food from the Japanese military. So there was a big question in the back of my mind about this.³⁴⁸

Americans became even more of a reality for Wilhelm and his brothers when they witnessed a US fighter being shot down. They were at a rock island just off Airai and they saw the pilot fall and "hit the water". The boys quickly went to the spot and

for sure he was a pilot, a flier, but we were surprised. For the first time in our lives to see a Caucasian, because the Japanese have a flat nose, black hair...but now we see a man with blonde [hair], yes, all for the first time. And for the first time for us to see a pilot with a pilot uniform, zippers all over and with pistol! We were young, so you know what we did? We took the pistol and we took the cigarettes and then we pulled and tied the body and tied it inside the mangrove and left it.³⁴⁹

The boys took the 'Lucky Strike' cigarettes and the gun to the village *hinanba*. They gave the gun to one of the elders and the cigarettes were chopped into small pieces and shared around so all the older people could try them.³⁵⁰

It is very possible that Wilhelm witnessed the shooting down of fighter pilot Lieutenant Robert L. Dilks, one of the few pilots missing in action in the Airai area. On

³⁴⁷Wilhelm Rengiil.

³⁴⁸Ibid.

³⁴⁹Ibid.

³⁵⁰Ibid.

Saturday, 9 June 1945, Lt. Robert Hauser was carrying out a strafing run over the southern end of Babeldaob with Lt. Dilks as his wingman. After completing his pass Hauser looked around to check on Dilks but found that he had vanished. All he could see was "a wake of turbulent, churned up water" in the lagoon just beyond the Toagel Passage. He radioed Dilks "several times" but received no reply so, with great concern, he made a number of passes over the area in search of some sign of what had happened. On his second pass Hauser, "noticed a parachute floating approximately in the middle of the wake". As Dilks could not have bailed out at such a low altitude, Hauser determined that when the plane was hit by "some sort of gunfire" he "may have been thrown clear of the plane causing the chute to open".³⁵¹ Despite thorough search missions during that day and the next, Lieutenant Dilks and his plane were never located.³⁵² It may be that Wilhelm and his friends were the last to see him.³⁵³

Wilhelm was intrigued and excited by the experience of seeing an American, though he was also afraid. For nearly all Palauans the Americans remained part of the unknown and dangerous. They were, after all, the enemy. Despite growing anger and frustration at the Japanese soldiers, Palauans had little choice but to listen to and obey them. When American aircraft began to scatter Psychological Warfare leaflets over the island beginning in May 1945³⁵⁴, most Palauans believed the Japanese soldiers who warned them: "Don't pick up those papers because there are bombs on them, and if you read them your eyes are going to be hurt".³⁵⁵ Skesuk Skang was so frightened that whenever she was outside and the leaflets began to fall and swirl around in the breeze, she would run to find shelter, because she believed "there were bombs attached to them".³⁵⁶

³⁵¹Statement of Lt. Robert Hauser in *War Diary VMF 122*, Saturday 9 June 1945.

³⁵²Other aircraft helped in the search on 9 June and two search missions were sent out on the 10th. *War Diary VMF 122*, Saturday 9 June 1945 & Sunday 10 June 1945.

³⁵³Wilhelm Rengiil continued "Right after World War Two, US military came and looked for those missing people and you know we were able to take them to the place and show them and of course there was only bones left".

³⁵⁴See *War Diary MAG 11*.

³⁵⁵Skesuk Skang.

³⁵⁶*Ibid.*

Many Palauans recall incidents involving the papers dropped from the planes. Temel Ngirchorachel believes that the people who escaped to the southern islands, pointed out the areas of Babeldaob in which Palauans were hiding and told the Americans that all Islanders could understand Japanese, so the leaflets should be scattered where Palauans could find them.³⁵⁷ Mengesebuuch Yalap remembers that some of them were clearly written for Islanders as they informed people not to be afraid and to

"Come out from where you are because the Americans are not looking for natives. They are looking for Japanese soldiers". But we were afraid anyway, so it didn't do much good for us.³⁵⁸

The Japanese warned of severe punishment for Islanders who disobeyed the order not to touch the leaflets. Dengelei Saburo was told that if soldiers saw Palauans with the papers, they would confiscate them and then beat the offenders.³⁵⁹ The soldiers would often collect the leaflets and burn them so that Islanders could not read them and therefore "had to trust the Japanese".³⁶⁰ Ngkeruker Salii was fishing amongst the mangroves during a period when the air attacks seemed to be diminishing.³⁶¹ A plane circled overhead and papers began to flutter down. She was frightened, but she quickly collected them and took them back to the shelter. Her husband, a policeman working for the Japanese, took them from her and destroyed them.³⁶² He may have been carrying out his security role or he may have been fully aware of what the soldiers would do to Islanders who were caught with the leaflets.

³⁵⁷Temel Ngirchorachel.

³⁵⁸Mengesebuuch Yalap. Mengesebuuch recalled hearing, after the war, that Itpik had been involved in writing the leaflets. She and Temel may be correct in their assumption that Itpik or other Palauan escapees had some involvement in the dropping of leaflets. In his interrogation Itpik did point out the location of Islanders' refuges. See *War Diary MAG 11*, Report of Interrogation of Native Civilian Internee, I.pik, 30 May 1945.

³⁵⁹Dengelei Saburo.

³⁶⁰Woman, Ngermid.

³⁶¹This could have been around 10-14 August 1945, when air attacks were cancelled "pending the outcome of peace negotiations". *War Diary VMF 122*, Saturday 11 August 1945.

³⁶²Ngkeruker Salii.

Jonathon Emul realized that the leaflets were "propaganda", directed at the soldiers, but he could see that the military was very wary about Islanders having seeing them.³⁶³

Some people did find a chance to read the leaflets. Delirang knew they were directed at Japanese soldiers because she collected and read them. She recalls one which told the military, "You might as well stop the war because your soldiers are eating rats' leftovers!"³⁶⁴ Minoru Ueki found that in cases where Palauans had clearly seen the papers and understood their message, the Japanese would seize them anyway and tell them, "It's not true. It is a lie. Japan will never be defeated!"³⁶⁵

But defeat was coming. Although Palauans were 'wholeheartedly' for the Japanese³⁶⁶ at the beginning of the conflict, as time passed many became aware that the Japanese too were fighting for survival. By August 1945 Palau had been in the midst of war for more than a year. In that month, Dengelei Saburo noticed

a change in the Japanese people, in their reactions. They looked different as if a person has lost something real bad that he had to look for it, he had to find it...They had that weary look in their faces, every soldier.³⁶⁷

The Americans were also becoming aware of a change in the circumstances of the war. On Friday 10 August the intelligence officer for VMF 122, wrote of "the rumored willingness of the Japanese to surrender". This news, announced by Radio Palau at 10 pm that night was, he recorded, "to understate the case, happily received".³⁶⁸

For the next few days all strikes were cancelled while pilots waited to hear the outcome of peace negotiations.³⁶⁹ Instead, fighters flew almost constant reconnaissance flights over the northern Palaus from 8 am to 5:30 pm,³⁷⁰ with the

³⁶³Jonathon Emul.

³⁶⁴Delirang.

³⁶⁵Dr. Minoru Ueki.

³⁶⁶Jonathon Emul recalls that one of the recited phrases was "I will become a whole-hearted Japanese."

³⁶⁷Dengelei Saburo.

³⁶⁸*War Diary VMF 122*, Friday 10 August 1945.

³⁶⁹*War Diary VMF 122*, Saturday 11 August 1945.

³⁷⁰*War Diary VMF 122*, Monday 13 August 1945.

Hellcats taking over for night patrol.³⁷¹ Pilots noted however, "with the exception of an occasional fisherman, life on Babelthiap and the other islands of the group appeared to be dormant".³⁷²

After waiting four days and hearing no confirmation of the Japanese surrender, the squadron commander made the decision to "resume combat activities".³⁷³ Ironically the pilots did so on 15 August 1945. Sometime after 8 am on that Wednesday morning, twelve planes left Peleliu for a bomb strike on Koror. At ten minutes to nine, twenty-four 500 pound general purpose bombs were dropped on targets at the western end of the island in "the last offensive mission of the war". Only fifteen minutes later, at 0905, "word of the successful termination of hostilities" reached the pilots as they rendezvoused after their bombing runs.³⁷⁴ All other scheduled strikes were cancelled and reconnaissance patrols were substituted. During these flights pilots saw "no indication that the inhabitants of the Northern Palaus had been apprised of the fact that the war at long last was over".³⁷⁵

For the next three days there was no sign of any activity and it was noted that Babeldaob "still gives no indication of being aware of the cessation of hostilities".³⁷⁶ The aircraft of VMF 122 continued their surveillance.

Below, many Palauans "did not know the war was going to be over". One man remembered that "there were very few people that the Japanese admitted to that the war was over".³⁷⁷ However word gradually spread. Rose Adelbai remembers being out in the field clearing coconut trees to plant new crops when a single plane flew overhead. Moments later a Palauan man who worked for the soldiers came to them.

³⁷¹*WW II Diary/Report file VMF (N) 541*, 11-13 August 1945.

³⁷²*War Diary VMF 122*, Monday 13 August 1945.

³⁷³*War Diary VMF 122*, Wednesday 15 August 1945.

³⁷⁴*Ibid.*

³⁷⁵*Ibid.*

³⁷⁶*War Diary VMF 122*, Saturday 18 August 1945.

³⁷⁷Man, Ngermid.

He told us to gather around and we were surprised because he was crying, he had tears and he was the one who told us there was no use continuing because we have lost the war and the Americans have won and *Tenno Heika* has already set peace with the Americans.³⁷⁸

Palauans reacted in many ways to this news - relief, fear, happiness and confusion.³⁷⁹ Mengesebuuch Yalap was afraid because she believed the Japanese soldiers were "selling us to the Americans" and therefore "it was not going to be easy for us".³⁸⁰ Mereb Eruang thought that "under the American people, it would probably be even worse, because they are going to kill us".³⁸¹

Yet some people began to emerge from their jungle *hinanba*. On Monday 20 August pilots noted seeing "a great many people...swimming, fishing, and working in gardens who made no attempt to conceal themselves".³⁸² The following day reconnaissance patrols reported

less timidity and increasing signs of friendliness on the part of the inhabitants of Babelthuap, both native and Japanese.³⁸³

On Wednesday 22 August a container was dropped on the Babeldaob airfield. Inside was a message addressed to General Sadae Inoue stating that if he was willing to comply with the surrender terms, he should arrange for a white cross to be displayed on the strip.³⁸⁴ Early the next morning, a group of American planes came out of the sun and passed over the strip, just as they had on the morning of 30 March 1944. This time they did not fire. Instead they noted, on the ruins of the runway, the outlines of an "unmistakeable white cross".³⁸⁵

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³⁷⁸Rose Adelbai.

³⁷⁹This is be discussed in the following chapter.

³⁸⁰Mengesebuuch Yalap.

³⁸¹Mereb Eruang.

³⁸²*War Diary VMF 122*, Monday 20 August 1945.

³⁸³*War Diary VMF 122*, Tuesday 21 August 1945.

³⁸⁴*War Diary VMF 122*, Wednesday 22 August 1945.

³⁸⁵*War Diary VMF 122*, Thursday 23 August 1945. & *War Diary MAG 11*, 23 August 1945.

One morning a short time after he had learned that the war was over and he did not have to hide from the planes anymore, young Anthony Polloi was out walking. He stopped suddenly when he saw some men approaching with guns. He was afraid, but also very curious because on top of one of the men's heads there was a striking halo of bright blonde hair. Before the war Anthony had attended catechism classes arranged by the local Catholic priest and there he had seen pictures of the Archangel Gabriel, with flowing blonde locks. No Japanese or Palauans had hair this light. Anthony shivered and 'kept his distance'. Hiding, he peered at the strange men for a short time. Then he quickly turned and ran as fast as he could back to his mother, shouting at her with excitement, "I've seen an angel! I've seen an angel!" ³⁸⁶

³⁸⁶Dr. Anthony Polloi.

Chapter Four

THE ANGEL GABRIEL

**The Coming of Peace
August - December 1945.**

On the fifteenth day of August 1945, Tivedakl Olblai was walking to her sister's farm in Aimeliik to collect tapioca. The garden was on a hill and just below lay a Japanese camp. Passing near the barracks, Tivedakl was surprised to see the area deserted except for a young Japanese boy who asked her where she was going. She said that she had intended to gather food, but was frightened because she had seen an American plane flying overhead. The boy told her, "Don't be afraid, because the war is over. So go ahead and get whatever you need".¹ Tivedakl was uncertain whether the boy was telling her the truth. She remembered that Morikawa had told her the war would end soon, but she needed confirmation. She said to the young man, "If you are really telling me the truth, why don't you run up the hill yourself and I'll see [what happens]".² After some hesitation the boy agreed and walked up to the top of the hill. Tivedakl watched in awe as the "plane was circling around, but it wasn't shooting at him".³ The boy called to her to join him.

While they stood there out in the open, the plane continued its reconnaissance and when Tivedakl waved, it scattered leaflets. Overcome with relief and happiness, she felt so good that she started "singing out loud, very loud". Gradually people began to appear at the base of the hill, staring at her as if she was "going crazy". One Peleliu man⁴ came as close as he dared while the plane was still visible. He scolded her for her antics and told her that she was showing no respect for the people of Aimeliik, who had shared their land and crops with the Peleliuans for so many months. He warned her to come down immediately before the Americans fired on her. Tivedakl told him that the

¹Tivedakl Olblai (W 1917).

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

⁴No name given.

plane was harmless now and it was safe to come right to the top of the hill. She explained excitedly that she had just heard that the war was over. They both watched as the plane circled again dropping papers and to Tivedakl "it seemed like the American pilots of the planes were happy to see Palauan people".⁵ It didn't take long to convince the man that it was now safe and he soon joined Tivedakl in shouting with happiness. Then he ran down the hill to share the news with the bewildered people below.

The same day, near the administrative centre at Aimeliik, Jonathon Emul joined other Palauans and Japanese at the regular morning gathering. He recalls that everything seemed "unusually quiet". No plane could be heard and the soldiers, who always rounded people up by yelling orders and making them rush to the assembly, were "solemn and so quiet".⁶ Everybody stood expectantly. The Japanese supervisor then began to speak in a measured tone. He explained that talks were going on between Washington and Tokyo and that the war may be ending soon. Later Jonathon heard from a military intelligence officer that there was definitely "no more war".⁷ At first he just "couldn't believe it". Yet the subdued behaviour of the Japanese and a sky clear except for occasional planes on reconnaissance encouraged him to believe it was true. He felt happy and sad at the same time; glad that the hostilities had ended but distressed as he realized it would mean separation from the Japanese "with whom we had lived together for so long".⁸

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At 1 pm that Wednesday, on the island of Ngesbus at the tip of Peleliu, American soldiers also gathered together, "to commemorate the end of the Japanese war".⁹ Chaplain Kimzey presided over the meeting and a speech was delivered by the

⁵Ibid.

⁶Jonathon Emul (M 1927).

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid.

⁹*Unit Journal, Headquarters 3d Battalion, 111th Infantry Regiment*, 15 August 1945. (Location 7/39/40/2, Box 21157, RG 407 Adjutant General's Office, Unit Operations Reports - World War II, National Archives, Suitland, MD).

commanding officer. A month later these men of the 3d battalion, 111th Infantry Regiment would be the first American troops to occupy the northern Palaus, but for now, after the ceremony, they returned to "usual garrison duties and activities".¹⁰

In the first days of peace, the intelligence officer for VMF 122 on Peleliu saw "no visible evidence that the enemy intended to capitulate".¹¹ A week later, although local surrender negotiations were progressing smoothly, the Japanese still warned that "any attempt" by American forces to occupy Babeldaob "would be resisted".¹²

On Sunday 2 September 1945, the day the Japanese signed their surrender in Tokyo Bay, Brigadier General Ford O. Rogers and Lieutenant General Sadae Inoue met aboard the USS Amick anchored off the southeast coast of Babeldaob.¹³ In this, the fourth of a series of meetings to negotiate surrender terms, General Inoue signed papers unconditionally relinquishing his troops in the Palau Islands to General Rogers.¹⁴ It was agreed that the Japanese would begin to evacuate all their troops from every island in the group to Babeldaob. This process would begin from Malakal, which was to become an American occupation headquarters in ten days.¹⁵ The following day at 8 am

squadron personnel turned out en masse along with all the other personnel of the Island Command to take part in victory ceremonies

¹⁰*Unit Journal, Hq. 3d Bn 111th Inf Regt*, 16 August 1945. The 111th Infantry Regiment had been moved to Peleliu in February 1945 and was involved in small scale actions in the rock islands north of Peleliu. Army ground actions on these islands are mentioned in *War Diary VMF 122*, Tuesday 8 May 1945 & *War Diary VMF 121*, 8 May 1945. Company I had taken Ujelang atoll in the Marshalls in April 1944 before being moved to Peleliu. See Shelby L. Stanton, *World War II Order of Battle*. (Galahad Books, New York, 1984) p. 217 and Philip A. Crowl & Edmund G. Love, *United States Army in World War II. The War in the Pacific : Seizure of the Gilberts and Marshalls*. (Center of Military History, United States Army, Washington DC, 1985) p. 367.

¹¹*War Diary VMF 122*, Thursday 16 August 1945.

¹²*War Diary VMF 122*, Friday 24 August 1945.

¹³*War Diary VMF 122*, Sunday 2 September 1945 & *Official War Diary, Headquarters, Island Command Peleliu*, September 1945. (Held at Operational Archives, Naval Historical Center).

¹⁴*Official War Diary, Island Command, Peleliu*, September 1945. Other meetings to negotiate the surrender were held on 23 August, 25 August and 1 September 1945. See *Ibid*, September 1945 (Chronology of Events for August) & October 1945 (Chronology of Events for September).

¹⁵*War Diary VMF 122*, Sunday 2 September 1945.

held in front of the Island Command Chapel on taxi strip F. An inspiring address was given by General Rogers.¹⁶

The task of the fighter squadron from that day became the observation of activities resulting from the evacuation agreement and the maintenance of a condition of "preparedness for any eventuality".¹⁷ As the intelligence officer noted, the "cautious transition from a state of war to one of peace" had begun.¹⁸

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Palauans learned of this change from war to peace in different ways. Finding out led to much confusion and fear about what the end of the war meant and what they should now do and feel. In many cases the Japanese were very reluctant to announce that the war was over and to admit that they had lost. Thus not all Palauans learned immediately that the hostilities were over. Most eventually found out from the Japanese or from relatives working for them. Others came to the realization after picking up and reading American propaganda leaflets. Confirmation came when it was clear that the planes had stopped firing. From these various sources the knowledge spread to most people.

Some Islanders who worked with the Japanese learned from their superiors about the loss of the war. Temel Ngirchorachel worked as an assistant to a Japanese lieutenant. A number of days before the end of the war became common knowledge, this officer had confided that he thought the war was reaching its climax.¹⁹ Not all people working for the Japanese military were advised in such a manner. While policeman Fumio Rengiil was informed by the Japanese about the end of the war, Alfonso Oiterong was told nothing.²⁰ He and his friends began to work it out for themselves. They were out in the open playing with a Japanese gun, pretending to

¹⁶*War Diary VMF 122*, Monday 3 September 1945. See also *Official War Diary, Island Command Peleliu*, September 1945.

¹⁷*War Diary VMF 122*, September 1945.

¹⁸*Ibid.*

¹⁹Temel Ngirchorachel (M 1928).

²⁰Fumio Rengiil (M 1917) & Alfonso Oiterong (M 1924).

shoot when a single American plane suddenly appeared. It was obvious that the pilot had seen them, but no shots were fired. Alfonso was surprised and very curious about the incident, so he asked a Japanese officer what was happening and only then was it disclosed to him that the war was over.²¹

Although working with Japanese soldiers, Baiei Babul was told nothing about the surrender. From comments some of the men made during preceding weeks, he did suspect the Japanese were losing the war. Then one morning he was ordered to accompany a detachment of soldiers to Ngatpang to collect more coconuts and

before we reached Ngatpang, in between Ngiwal and Ngaraard, there was a centre, another small station for one Japanese soldier and one Palauan and they were there. As we passed there the Palauan told us that the war is over.²²

The soldiers Baiei was with, however, had revealed nothing.²³

In some areas, announcements were made at morning gatherings as they were in Aimeliik.²⁴ In the rock islands off Koror there were assemblies every morning at which Palauans were given their day's orders. Delirang recalls that sometime in the middle of August people began to notice that the planes had stopped shooting. Then one morning the officer in charge of the meeting arrived very late and announced that they could go fishing or to the taro patch whenever they liked without being afraid because the Japanese had lost the war.²⁵

Those who heard announcements from the Japanese passed the news to relatives and friends.²⁶ Ascension Ngelmas recalls that everyone in Airai was "talking about it", both the soldiers and the Palauans, so the word spread there fairly quickly.²⁷

²¹Alfonso Oiterong.

²²Baiei Babul (M 1921).

²³Ibid.

²⁴Jonathon Emul.

²⁵Delirang (W 1900). Mengesebuuch Yalap (W 1929) also learned of the end of the war at a morning gathering. Dirreou Orrukei (W 1925) was "informed" by the Japanese that the war was over.

²⁶Ngkeruker Salii (W 1902) learned that the war had ended from her husband who was told by a friend.

²⁷Ascension Ngelmas (W 1915).

Further north in Ngaraard, a woman in refuge from Peleliu "didn't know much". She remembers,

The Japanese people did not tell us that the war was going to end. We just noticed that the planes were not coming anymore. Maybe one or two would fly above, but they wouldn't shoot so we would talk amongst ourselves that maybe the war is over.²⁸

Their suspicions were only confirmed when Palauans came to Ngaraard from Koror with news of the surrender.

Felix Yaoch and his family also "got the word" from relatives. A cousin who was working with the Japanese military police

came over and he said the war is over. But we asked the Japanese and a lot of them didn't even know or if they knew they wouldn't readily admit defeat. So we went out fishing. We dared to go out fishing and the US Naval plane came by. It came very low so we jumped into the sea and went through all the motions of safety and then it just flew and nothing happened, so we looked at each other and said, "It's got to be true, it's over!" So the next time when it turned around and came back we just sat and watched it and we saw these soldiers in blue uniforms looking out those bubble windows and waving so we waved back and that was an assurance that before the word was official, that it's true, the war is over.²⁹

For quite a number of people no official word ever came about the end of the war. Skesuk Skang and Saruang Bekemekmad only knew of it from leaflets dropped from the planes. Saruang remembers "it was for four days that the planes were flying up above, but they didn't shoot. On the fourth day they were dropping down fliers".³⁰ Despite Japanese warnings about punishment she collected the papers and read that the Japanese had lost the war. This made sense of the fact that the planes had recently stopped firing.³¹

²⁸Woman, Peleliu (1927).

²⁹Father Felix Yaoch (M 1932).

³⁰Saruang Bekemekmad (1915). This could have been the four day period from 11-14 August 1945. During that time planes only conducted reconnaissance flights and on the 14th Psychological Warfare leaflets were dropped on Babeldaob. Alternatively, Saruang could be referring to the period 15-18 August 1945 as, after the Koror attack in the early morning of the 15th, only reconnaissance flights were conducted, and on the fourth day, 18 August, leaflets were again dropped. See *War Diary MAG 11* entries for 11-18 August 1945.

³¹Saruang Bekemekmad.

Rose Kebekol also read the leaflets, which announced "The war has ended, so come out of the jungle". Her sister-in-law gathered them and showed them to her relatives. Some people refused to believe it and one man told her it was simply "not true". Yet Rose noticed that the planes continued to circle without strafing or bombing and decided that maybe what was written on the papers was the truth.³²

Palauans who concluded from the available evidence that there was a change in the circumstances of the war, often became more confused when they approached the Japanese for confirmation and the soldiers denied that anything had happened.³³ However the facts became very clear when American soldiers began to arrive. For some Palauans this was the first real evidence that the Japanese had lost the war. Tutii Ngirutoi, for example, only knew the war was over "when the Navy came to Palau."³⁴ Wilhelm Rengiil clearly remembers the day he learned the war was over. He and his friends would often swim across the Koror-Babeldaob channel during the day to try and find extra food supplies. They felt that without a boat, just swimming, they were small enough targets not to be picked out by the planes. This particular day they swam across and just as they were passing through the village of Ngersaol at the northern end of Koror, they heard a noise, like that of a car engine. Wilhelm recalls they immediately

stopped and all of a sudden, we saw military in uniform with machine guns, so we are shaking because we thought that they have invaded Koror and now they're coming to invade Babeldaob. We were scared so we went again inside the mangrove and hid ourselves.³⁵

The boys continued to hide as they watched a number of vehicles pass by and then moments later they saw a group of older Palauans. They approached and the men informed them that,

³²Rose Kebekol (W 1922).

³³Dr. Minoru Ueki (M 1930).

³⁴Tutii Ngirutoi (M 1919).

³⁵Wilhelm Rengiil (M 1929).

The war is ended, but you have to be very careful because the [American] military is going around and if you do something strange, you'll be shot. So best way is when you see the car, you make it stop like this - [arms in the air in signal of surrender].³⁶

So the next time the four boys saw an American vehicle they stood in the middle of the road and surrendered, and "in that spot, that's where we learned the war is ended!" For some teenage boys the curiosity that made the war an adventure spilled over into the peace. Although their initial reaction to the end of the war might be fear, this was quickly followed by much excitement and anticipation.

The most common emotions Palauans experienced at the end of the war were fear and joy. Palauans were afraid when they learned the Americans had won the war because they "knew nothing of Americans" except what the Japanese had told them.³⁷ The "world was Japanese and Palauans".³⁸ Some people thought that conditions might be even worse in this new world. Rose Adelbai remembers her mixed feelings of sorrow that the Japanese had lost the war, relief that it was over, and fear of "what we were going to face with the Americans. I didn't know what they were. I did not know whether they were going to be more cruel".³⁹

Saruang Bekemekmad "hesitated" when she realized that because the war was over "we were going to be under Americans". She remembers that "we didn't want that".⁴⁰ Mengesebuuch Yalap shared Saruang's fear at being "given to the Americans". Too afraid to emerge, she stayed hidden in the jungle.⁴¹ Ngkeruker Salii was initially "very happy" when she learned that the war had ended, until she "started to think about how Americans might be". She remembers that after the surrender there was "a word" circulating that all the Angaurese should go to Renrak ("the harbour" meaning the

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Augusta Ramarui (W 1923).

³⁸Dr. Anthony Polloi (M 1936).

³⁹Rose Adelbai (W 1921).

⁴⁰Saruang Bekemekmad.

⁴¹Mengesebuuch Yalap.

Airai side of the Koror-Babeldaob channel) to board ships and return to their island.

During the long walk from Ngkeklau she thought about the future and in terror

sat down near the road and I was crying because I was afraid of the Americans. Even though I had not seen them before I had this image of them - how they were probably scary looking. So my mother came and asked me "What's going on? Aren't you going to Renrak to get on the ship going to Angaur?" and I said, "No, I am afraid of Americans. I don't want to go there."⁴²

Her husband came to her and pointed out that she could remain on Babeldaob alone if she wished, but the family was returning to Angaur! Ngkeruker had little choice so she continued despite her fear.

Ngkeruker's anxiety about the Americans was stronger than the feelings of the rest of her family. Baiei Babul, in contrast, remembers he was "so overjoyed to the point that I wondered whether other Palauans felt the same as I did. I did not know what to do next!"⁴³ Many clearly did feel the same, as Baiei recalls there were celebrations.⁴⁴ Fumio Rengiil remembers that nearly "every day" people had "parties" and ironically "celebrated not winning!"⁴⁵ For many people, being safe outweighed feelings about the Japanese, the lost war, the future and the Americans. There was immense relief at being able to go out into the open to farm and fish without being frightened of being shot. The planes still circled above and only when they "flew really low down, near the trees" did Baiei feel nervous, mainly out of habit.⁴⁶

Aircraft from VMF 122 continued their daily reconnaissance until late October 1945. Pilots observed more and more activity. They noted the presence of "numerous fishing craft", the repair of "damaged dwellings" and "some public works".⁴⁷ They also reported "gardens developing under daytime care"⁴⁸ and that "large areas of land in

⁴²Ngkeruker Salii.

⁴³Baiei Babul.

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Fumio Rengiil.

⁴⁶Baiei Babul.

⁴⁷*War Diary VMF 122*, Tuesday 21 August 1945.

⁴⁸*War Diary VMF 122*, Thursday 30 August 1945.

the central section of Babelthuap were being cleared ostensibly for agricultural purposes".⁴⁹

Much of people's happiness stemmed from the feeling that finally normal life could begin again, because they need no longer fear bombing and strafing. Felix Yaoch feels that "I was too young to feel happy that the war was over, but we felt that security already, that you can go out without worrying".⁵⁰ Wilhelm Rengiil and Tosiwo Nakamura felt "happy" because they were "so safe and at peace"⁵¹ and now "could go out in the daylight".⁵² Obechou Delutaoch was "very happy" that the danger was passed and she could think of returning to Peleliu. She finally felt "at peace".⁵³

The day after Tivedakl Olblai learned that the war was over, she met a Japanese teacher who had seen her singing with joy on top of the hill in Aimeliik. He confirmed that it was her and then said with regret,

"Only one day of American time and you have forgotten the thirty years that the Palauans and the Japanese have been together - only one day and you are singing out loud as you've never sung before in the thirty years we were together!"⁵⁴

Tivedakl explained that she had not forgotten the past and was singing because she was "happy, very happy that I will be able to go back to my place, Peleliu and I'm going to eat well". The teacher said he understood some of her feelings, but again voiced his disappointment that it only took her "one day" to "forget thirty years".⁵⁵

Many Palauans, particularly those working closely with the soldiers, realized what the end of the war would mean for the Japanese. Jonathon Emul worked for the Japanese military and had "plenty of friends" amongst them. He was very sad at the thought of them leaving Palau.

⁴⁹*War Diary VMF 122*, Friday 31 August 1945.

⁵⁰Father Felix Yaoch.

⁵¹Wilhelm Rengiil.

⁵²Tosiwo Nakamura (M 1938).

⁵³Obechou Delutaoch (W 1917).

⁵⁴Tivedakl Olblai.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*

I wanted them to stay in Palau as long as Americans allow them, but they had to leave straight away. It took a very long time before we forget this feeling of friendship.⁵⁶

Augusta Ramarui felt that the Japanese "were my people". She was "very sad" that the end of the war meant they had to leave, but she also believed that they had been "very cruel to Palauans during the war". She recalls that when the war was over some people did not overlook this cruel treatment and "went after them [the Japanese] and beat them in retaliation so they ran away".⁵⁷ Alfonso Oiterong remembers that when those Palauans who had been "treated...very badly" by the Japanese soldiers during the war learned it was over, they sought out the culprits and

some Japanese were beaten up and some ran away...[These Palauans] beat up the Japanese who were really their enemy because they pushed them to work and they really had a hard time with them.⁵⁸

Some Japanese, especially those who were "cruel" or "very strict" and "abused the Palauans" knew they were in danger. Many escaped to Koror or into the jungle the moment they heard the war had ended because they expected retaliation from Palauans.⁵⁹ Others tried to apologize and "make friends".⁶⁰ Dengelei Saburo knew that some Palauans saw that it was now "their turn". She recalls that

It was especially...the Palauan people who were older than the Japanese soldiers. They [the Palauans] would work for them and if they did something bad or they forgot something, the Japanese would beat them really bad. So these Palauans were looking out for those soldiers and so they had to flee.⁶¹

A Ngermid man did not feel any sympathy for the Japanese when they were forced to leave after the war, because he harboured a "grudge against them" because of

⁵⁶Jonathon Emul.

⁵⁷Augusta Ramarui.

⁵⁸Alfonso Oiterong.

⁵⁹Dengelei Saburo (W 1930).

⁶⁰Alfonso Oiterong.

⁶¹Dengelei Saburo.

their cruelty during the long year of war and famine.⁶² Another woman despises the Japanese even now because they left the Palauans bewildered and frightened.

We Palauans didn't know anything, weren't told anything and we minded our own business and yet many Palauans died because of the war. It was the fault of the Japanese.⁶³

The transition from war to peace was a sudden event. There was little time to come to terms with what peace meant or to sort out feelings about the Japanese losing the war. Almost immediately Islanders had to face the prospect of meeting Americans, who had been "the enemy" for such a long time. When the war was at its worst and the Japanese at their most callous, some had thought surrender to the Americans could be their salvation, but now faced with the reality many realized they really knew nothing about *chad er a Merikel*, the people of the west. Americans were now in control of their future and no-one could know what that meant.

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With the cessation of hostilities, the full extent of damage inflicted on the enemy by our bombing, shelling and strafing over a period of approximately one year will be learned.⁶⁴

After the surrender on 2 September, American forces in Peleliu began to gain a clearer picture of the damage in human as well as material terms. Now under their control were 39,997 people according to General Inoue's figures - 18,493 Japanese Army personnel, 6,404 Navy, 9,750 civilian Japanese and 5,350 "natives".⁶⁵ On Tuesday 11 September the chief of staff, with a group of Island Command staff officers, travelled north to inspect Malakal, Arakabesang and Koror Islands "preparatory to their occupation by U.S. forces".⁶⁶ At 11:30 am, four days later, and exactly one month after the end of the war, soldiers of Company K, 3d Battalion, 111th

⁶²Man, Ngermid (1919).

⁶³Woman, Ngermid (1922).

⁶⁴*Official War Diary, Headquarters, Island Command Peleliu*, 5 September 1945.

⁶⁵*Official War Diary, Headquarters, Island Command Peleliu*, 5 October 1945. See also Chapter Three, footnotes 7 and 8 for discussion of wartime population of Japanese and Islanders.

⁶⁶*Ibid.* See also *Unit Journal Hq. 3d Bn 111th Inf*, 11 September 1945.

Infantry Regiment landed on Malakal Island, which had been evacuated by the Japanese.⁶⁷ Over the next three days, further companies left Peleliu to occupy Koror and Arakabesang islands.⁶⁸ The task of all these troops was "to conduct a reconnaissance, search for enemy stragglers, and prepare facilities for the Military Government Headquarters".⁶⁹

On 18 September a conference was held in battered Koror Town. Japanese and US. representatives met in order that information concerning prisoners of war in the Palau area could be gathered. It was also arranged that "surrender of arms on Babelthuap [would] commence the following day".⁷⁰ During this process young Wilhelm Rengiil made his first contact with American forces.

On the day that Wilhelm and his four friends surrendered themselves to American soldiers in a jeep at the northern end of Koror, the *nisei* interpreter with them told the boys to return the next day and, "Make sure that when you come tomorrow, bring a Japanese sword...and we will exchange it with cigarettes and all kinds of food."⁷¹ The boys agreed. Each day they returned to the spot with a sword and the Americans

exchanged all these things. They gave us cartons of cigarettes, ten, twenty for one Japanese sword...and we felt that we were betrayed by Japanese administration and Japanese soldiers [because] Americans are good people. They are kind and they are rich and they have almost everything.⁷²

In coming to Koror Island Wilhelm Rengiil would have been among the first Palauans to make contact with American soldiers. The initial landing forces were

⁶⁷*Official War Diary, Headquarters, Island Command Peleliu*, 5 October 1945 & *Unit Journal Hq.3d Bn 111th Inf*, 15 September 1945.

⁶⁸*Unit Journal Hq.3d Bn 111th Inf*. On 16 September 1945 Company I occupied Arakabesang, on 17 September Company L occupied Koror, and on 18 September Company M (Heavy Weapons) and Headquarters Company, 3d Battalion arrived at Koror. On 21 September "a U.S. Naval Construction Battalion detachment of 2 officers and 56 enlisted men of the 503rd and 571st Construction Battalion Maintenance Units was attached to Headquarters Company...at Koror". See *Official War Diary, Headquarters, Island Command Peleliu*, 5 October 1945.

⁶⁹*Official War Diary, Headquarters, Island Command Peleliu*, 5 October 1945.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*

⁷¹Wilhelm Rengiil

⁷²*Ibid.*

instructed only to secure and "conduct close and meticulous exploration of" the islands of Malakal, Arakabesang and Koror.⁷³ At this early stage of occupation, there was very little incursion onto Babeldaob itself. Instead, on 25 September Japanese representatives came from Babeldaob to the command post on Koror for a further meeting to discuss and arrange the collection of their arms and ammunition from the northern Palaus.⁷⁴ This process was declared complete on 29 September⁷⁵ and Colonel Fike, and members of Island Command, Peleliu, visited Koror to "supervise the pick-up" of the surrendered Japanese arms.⁷⁶

Only one small landing force was sent beyond the Koror area to carry out a reconnaissance of small islands to the south and north of the Palau group "to locate, evacuate, and provide care for missing persons of Allied Nations and to report of the conditions of those islands".⁷⁷ During early October the surrender of Japanese forces on all the smaller islands and atolls surrounding the Palaus was secured.⁷⁸ This month also saw more activity in the Palaus themselves with the establishment of Military Government Headquarters on Koror and the beginning of the evacuation of Japanese troops and civilians to Japan.⁷⁹

On 2 October, under a high and hot sun, a landing craft carrying 70 tons of rations arrived at the Babeldaob pier.⁸⁰ This shipment of American food, made up of Army rations in stock on Peleliu, was to be distributed "pro-rata on Babelthuap" and in

⁷³Letter of Instruction, Headquarters, Island Command, 12 September 1945 attached to *Unit History, 111th Infantry Regiment - July-November 1945*, (Location 7/39/40/2, Box 21156, RG 407).

⁷⁴*Official War Diary, Headquarters, Island Command Peleliu*, 5 October 1945. See also *Unit Journal Hq.3d Bn 111th Inf*, 24 & 25 September 1945. It seems that Japanese were ordered to collect their arms and bring them to Babeldaob pier where they were handed over to the Americans.

⁷⁵*Official War Diary, Headquarters, Island Command Peleliu*, 5 October 1945.

⁷⁶*Unit Journal Hq.3d Bn 111th Inf*, 29 September 1945.

⁷⁷The islands concerned were Helen Reef and Ngulu. *Unit History, 111th Infantry Regiment*, 27 September 1945. See also *Official War Diary, Headquarters, Island Command Peleliu*, 5 October 1945.

⁷⁸Including the Southwest Islands of Sonsorol, Fana, Tobi and Merir. *Official War Diary, Headquarters, Island Command Peleliu*, 5 November 1945.

⁷⁹*Official War Diary, Headquarters, Island Command Peleliu*, 5 November 1945. During the month 951 troops were evacuated from Palau and 896 Japanese nationals from the Southwest Islands.

⁸⁰*Unit Journal Hq.3d Bn 111th Inf*, 2 October 1945. The shipment arrived just before 12 noon.

Koror.⁸¹ Near the end of the month an advance party of the 3d Battalion, 26th Marines arrived on Malakal to relieve the 111th of its duties in the Palaus.⁸² Over a number of days, elements of the 111th left Koror and the other occupied islands for Peleliu, where they planned for their return to the United States.⁸³ With the arrival of the 26th Marines, the American occupation of the whole of the Palaus, including Babeldaob began.⁸⁴

The distribution of food and the beginning of patrols by Marines on Babeldaob brought the majority of Palauans into contact with Americans for the first time. Many Palauans clearly recall their first sight of American soldiers : where it took place, what happened and how they felt. For a large number this event took place at Renrak, at the southern end of Babeldaob.

Dengelei Saburo remembers that the Japanese remained in Ngchesar from the end of the war until October, when word came that the soldiers and civilians were to go to Koror. About the same time Palauans heard that they were to assemble at Renrak to receive food and medical treatment.⁸⁵ Temel Ngirchorachel read leaflets telling people to go to Airai and "there will be food".⁸⁶ Alfonso Oiterong was at the pier, on the Babeldaob side, when the landing craft arrived loaded with Army rations and remembers, "that's where we were called in and they [the Americans] started to distribute food".⁸⁷ He was very "interested" to see what Americans looked like.

⁸¹*Military Government Unit, Palau Islands - Monthly Report for November 1945.* (RG 313, Box 6913).

⁸²*Unit Journal Hq.3d Bn 111th Inf*, 26 & 29 October 1945. The 26th Marines officially relieved the 3d. Bn. 111th Infantry Regiment on 29 October 1945. The 111th Infantry was a National Guard Unit (Pennsylvania) and these units had priority in being sent home. The 26th Marines came to Palau from occupation duty in Sasebo, Japan. Prior to that the Regiment had fought on Iwo Jima as part of the 5th Marine Division. *War Diary, 26th Marines (Reinforced)*, November 1945. (Operational Archives, NHC) However, given the extraordinarily high casualty rate on Iwo Jima, it is likely that most of the men serving with the 26th in Palau were late war replacements. Paul Walter comment to author.

⁸³*Unit Journal Hq.3d Bn 111th Inf*, 27-30 October 1945.

⁸⁴*War Diary, 26th Marines (Reinforced)*, December 1945.

⁸⁵Dengelei Saburo.

⁸⁶Temel Ngirchorachel.

⁸⁷Alfonso Oiterong. Wilhelm Rengiil also described the arrival of the landing craft carrying rations.

Jonathon Emul also saw Americans for the first time at Renrak. His immediate impression was that everything was "big"! The soldiers were "six foot tall and their truck is twice the height of the Japanese!...With their truck, the Japanese truck can go right underneath"!⁸⁸

At the harbour, one woman remembers seeing "plenty of Americans" disembarking from a ship. She was very frightened of them because of their different uniforms, "anyone in uniform scared us". Yet she was mostly troubled because she could not understand their speech or what was going on. She was confused, "not knowing who to believe. We had been told by the Japanese that the Americans would be after all the women so we were scared".⁸⁹

Many Palauans recall their initial terror at the strange appearance and speech of the American soldiers. Ngkeruker Salii was in awe of the "white people"⁹⁰ and a Ngermid man was "afraid of them" even though they "seemed nice".⁹¹ Temel Ngirchorachel

was in shock to see how they were built and their white skin. They were very tall and they were in shorts and they were chewing tobacco so we wondered what they were eating and spitting out.⁹²

To Mengesebuuch Yalap the soldiers she saw in their jeeps were "tall and they had long noses". She was very nervous at first until she noticed that the men did not seem to have any weapons, but instead were distributing food.⁹³ Skesuk Skang's reaction to the sight of Americans was bewilderment. She recalls,

I was confused because they were Black Americans. For Palauans Americans were supposed to be white...There were a lot of Black Americans and a few white Americans so I didn't know whether it

⁸⁸Jonathon Emul.

⁸⁹Woman, Ngermid.

⁹⁰Ngkeruker Salii.

⁹¹Man, Ngermid.

⁹²Temel Ngirchorachel.

⁹³Mengesebuuch Yalap.

was the black ones who were in top rank or the white ones...but I noticed that the Black Americans had to do the service.⁹⁴

The soldiers Skesuk saw may have been serving in stevedore or other service units, present at Renrak to assist in unloading food supplies.⁹⁵ It is more probable that they were attached to one of the Construction Battalion Maintenance Units which arrived in the northern Palaus in September "to repair roads and rehabilitate such wharves as are necessary to supply the occupation troops".⁹⁶

After a year of famine, surviving on the smallest possible amounts of leaves and roots, Palauans were astounded at the quantity of food the Americans handed out to them. Much of it was strange, but many found that apart from that it was "first class".⁹⁷ At the end of the war Augusta Ramarui feels that the Palauans "were dead people. We didn't have any food, so they [the Americans] brought us medicines, food. Even clothing."⁹⁸ Everything seemed limitless. Wilhelm Rengiil remembers watching the soldiers unload the food supplies.

When the landing ship came to...that side of Babeldaob, then unload all kind of military C rations⁹⁹, that was food, you know, from [one] end to the [other] end and it was given to the people free!...And piles and piles and we were made to, hired to be security guards to guard those rations and everyday people come and hundreds and hundreds of cases were given.¹⁰⁰

Not only was there huge amounts of rations, but everything also seemed outsized. The cans of food were "the *big* cans of corned beef. They were good. The biscuits were big...the corned beef was like a half a foot long!"¹⁰¹ There was so much

⁹⁴Skesuk Skang (W 1914). Other Palauans interviewed also commented on their surprise at seeing Black Americans. See Saruang Bekemekmad and Rose Adelbai.

⁹⁵In World War Two the majority of Black Americans in the Armed Forces served in service units "performing hard manual labour such as road building, stevedoring, and laundering...Blacks assigned to engineer and quartermaster units served almost everywhere in the Pacific". Spector, pp. 387-88.

⁹⁶*Official War Diary, Headquarters, Island Command Peleliu*, 5 October 1945.

⁹⁷Man, Ngernmid.

⁹⁸Augusta Ramarui.

⁹⁹C rations included "some kind of meat, instant coffee, lemonade powder...a chocolate bar, hard candy, toilet paper, chewing gum, crackers or canned bread, and cigarettes." Perret, p. 301.

¹⁰⁰Wilhelm Rengiil.

¹⁰¹Skesuk Skang.

food that someone could open a can, eat just half of its contents and throw the rest away.¹⁰² One woman thought the "Spam and corned beef" were particularly good, because it was "all canned so we didn't have to cook".¹⁰³ A lot of the food was unfamiliar. Rose Adelbai

only knew rice. I only recognized rice but they [the other foods] were good to eat though. Corned beef *this big!* [shows size on her arm - from hand to elbow, about 1 foot long] We went ahead and ate them because we had been hungry for a long time. My nephew, he and a friend were hungry so they went and opened a packet of powdered eggs and after they opened it they didn't know what to do with it, so they licked it and they sneezed and wondered what it was!¹⁰⁴

The soldiers did not explain how to use the food and people could not read the labels, so they experimented.¹⁰⁵ A number of people recall being handed small "paper bags" with different "ready-made" foods and "goodies" inside - sweets, bread or cracker biscuits, chocolate and cigarettes.¹⁰⁶ Some people simply did not know how they were supposed to eat these unusual foods.¹⁰⁷ When the Americans distributed "gallons" of cheese and butter, Ascension Ngelmas had no idea what they were, so she threw them away.¹⁰⁸ Palauans were not accustomed to dairy products and when people opened the cheese and smelled the odd aroma, they said "This is spoiled." and gave it away or dumped it.¹⁰⁹ Wilhelm Rengiil remembers that Pastor Fey "saved gallons and gallons of cheese" from people who were going to throw it away. He knew what it was and didn't want good food to be wasted so he said, "You can give

¹⁰²Benged Sechewas (W 1916).

¹⁰³Woman, Ngermid.

¹⁰⁴Rose Adelbai.

¹⁰⁵Ibid.

¹⁰⁶Ngkeruker Salii & Ascension Ngelmas. This was probably C rations or K rations.

¹⁰⁷Dr. Anthony Polloi.

¹⁰⁸Ascension Ngelmas.

¹⁰⁹Wilhelm Rengiil & Anthony Polloi.

them to us, if they're spoiled give them to us".¹¹⁰ Temel Ngirchorachel, however, did not wish to throw away anything at all. "I liked it. There was nothing that could ever have beaten American food! I was almost stingy about sharing with other people."¹¹¹

Despite its unfamiliarity, American food was extremely popular and most people remember the joy and relief of eating good food again. For many, the fear with which they approached Americans was quickly diluted by the soldiers' obvious kindness and generosity. There was a sharp contrast between the starvation of the past and the glut of food in the present, between the tired and careless brutality of the Japanese and the attentive concern of the Americans. For these Palauans the transition to acceptance of the American intruders was swift.

Yet it could still be unsettling and frightening. Palauans remember being called to Renrak both for food distribution and for a medical check - "first it was food and when we returned to Renrak again it was medicine."¹¹² While the distribution of food is recalled by most people with obvious pleasure, medical examinations are described in a more negative light.¹¹³ For many this second experience added to their terror of the unknown, for others it was simply embarrassing, for some of the younger boys, intriguing.

The first American Dengelei Saburo saw was "the doctor at Renrak". There was an announcement that all people in Ngchesar should go to the pier at the end of Babeldaob for a medical examination. Dengelei was very afraid because the Japanese had told her that Americans would rape Palauan women. When she reached Renrak she saw the doctor and

everybody was saying that he was the doctor, you call him 'Doctor', so I thought he was the commanding officer of all these people and he is probably the worst man ever!¹¹⁴

¹¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹¹Temel Ngirchorachel.

¹¹²Mengesebuuch Yalap.

¹¹³The war diary of Island Command Peleliu states that, "native populations on Peleliu, Angaur, Koror, as well as on Kayangel, are receiving medical attention by officer and enlisted personnel of this unit. This work will be extended to Babelthuap natives in the near future." *Official War Diary, Hq. Island Command Peleliu*, 3 December 1945.

¹¹⁴Dengelei Saburo.

Everyone was made to line up and the doctor gave them an injection as well as a "liquid medicine that was kind of sweet". Afterwards the Americans handed out "food in a paper-bag" - cookies, chocolate and cigarettes "with ten sticks inside, but very small", and everyone went back to the boat to return to Ngchesar.¹¹⁵

Mengesebuuch Yalap recollects that "most of the Palauans were afraid to see this doctor".¹¹⁶ She cried because she was so scared. The doctor seemed caring. He was giving everybody injections and

he was nice. He would rub the children's hands and their head, but they cried anyway, especially when he was ready to give them injections - then they would cry out loud!¹¹⁷

This did not lessen Mengesebuuch's terror. After receiving the injection she returned to Aimeliik and

it got swollen so big that we were afraid that the Americans had put poison in us. So we put hot water and leaves on it to make it go down and we went to the Abai and there was a Palauan policeman over there and he was telling us that - No! It was to cure the germs or the virus because otherwise we would be sick...It was required for everybody.¹¹⁸

The doctor at Renrak also carried out a basic physical examination and a few tests. Ascension Ngelmas was terrified when he checked her because he touched her breasts. She was also given an injection and a urine test. After a little while Ascension was more "confused" than scared because the Japanese had said the Americans would torture Islanders,

but when we actually met them, they were easy going...They wore all white uniforms and they were kind of funny [because] they were saying things that I didn't understand.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵Ibid.

¹¹⁶Mengesebuuch Yalap.

¹¹⁷Ibid.

¹¹⁸Ibid.

¹¹⁹Ascension Ngelmas.

Many people had been very ill during the war because of lack of food, immense stress and exposure and that was the reason they were called down to Airai, where "there were American doctors and they were curing them".¹²⁰ The most common problems amongst Islanders, apart from malnutrition, were skin diseases: *Tutk*, a condition related to leprosy and *Kerdik* or yaws.¹²¹ Saruang Bekemekmad remembers that

one [of the conditions] would appear on the soles of your feet and on the palms of your hands, but the other one would be all over your body. The American doctors did a good job, because there is none of it now in Palau.¹²²

Dengelei Saburo saw a lot of people with *Kerdik*, which was like

round marks, infections in the skin, everywhere on the skin. It wouldn't smell good, it smelled bad. It was easy to transfer from one person to another.¹²³

Some people still carry scars and marks on their body from the diseases. Mengesebuuch Yalap remembers that the doctors explained through interpreters that the sickness was a result of exposure to the cold at night and of malnutrition.¹²⁴ She recalls seeing Itpik, the Palauan man who had escaped to Peleliu during the war, at Renrak. He was an interpreter for the Americans. His explanations did little to allay some people's fear.

For Felix Yaoch, however, the day he came down to Airai for a medical check-up was very exciting.

It was an unusual and interesting experience because I'd never seen a very hairy man and for the first time I see this very hairy [man], different, reddish hair with blue eyes, green eyes. So those were the points that attracted me and while he, I don't know whether he was a doctor or a corpsman, was examining me I was busy also, feeling

¹²⁰Saruang Bekemekmad.

¹²¹Ibid. Ringworm was also common. Dr. Anthony Polloi (Macdonald Hospital, Koror) translated and explained these Palauan terms to the author.

¹²²Ibid.

¹²³Dengelei Saburo.

¹²⁴Mengesebuuch Yalap. During the interview, Mengesebuuch pointed out the marks on her own skin caused by disease.

his arm and his hair and he was laughing. There was nothing of those threats we heard, nor did I ever remember those threats. I was just fascinated by the difference there was that I saw.¹²⁵

Near the end of December, the different looking American soldiers of the 26th Marines began the "patrolling and occupation of Babelthuap Island".¹²⁶ During these reconnaissance expeditions those Palauans who did not go to Renrak had their first sight of Americans. A woman in Ngaraard was out farming when two Americans soldiers suddenly appeared. She recalls they "were big and tall and they had long noses". Approaching her they began to say something "and the way they were speaking, I felt dominance in the low voice they spoke with. Low and fast."¹²⁷ Their uniforms were also a strange colour - "tan, like coconut trees when they're wilted and no longer green".¹²⁸ For a moment she was transfixed and then she quickly ran away to hide because she thought they were probably talking about how they were going to kill her.¹²⁹

Tibedakl Olblai had a similar experience. She was walking with another woman down a track in Ngeremenglui, when

there came two soldiers and I was very afraid of them because their eyes were kind of reddish and their hair was different and they were pale white. We stood up straight because we were afraid and there was a phrase, something that they said that I have never forgotten, even now. They said "Let's go play"...We were afraid that they'd probably shoot us and we didn't understand what "Let's go play" was all about, but they took out candies and cigarettes and other kinds of goodies from their pockets and started giving them to us.¹³⁰

The two women did not know what they should do, but when a Palauan man arrived, the two Americans turned and left.¹³¹

¹²⁵Father Felix Yaoch.

¹²⁶*War Diary, 26th Marines (Reinforced)*, December 1945.

¹²⁷Woman, Peleliu.

¹²⁸The men were probably wearing summer weight clothing: their "cottons" or "tans".

¹²⁹*Ibid.*

¹³⁰Tibedakl Olblai.

¹³¹*Ibid.*

When Augusta Ramarui first encountered Americans she was the one to turn and leave. She had been out gathering food in the jungle when three white men appeared. "I got really scared because they [the Japanese] say if they land here they rape the women".¹³² The men were saying something to her and then made gestures with their hands. Augusta asked in Japanese what they wanted. She thought it might be water so she took them to the nearest stream and then ran away as fast as she could.

Minoru Ueki hid himself when he saw a large vehicle carrying American soldiers. He watched, intrigued at the physical appearance of the men - hairy and red skinned. He was afraid of them but he also had to "hold back", because he was "really still wanting to fight".¹³³ Some other young men who had been members of the *Giyu-Kirikomi-tai* also reacted strongly against the Americans. Francisco Morei "felt that the Americans had big bodies. Their eyes looked like snake eyes, blue instead of brown, and their mouths were never still".¹³⁴ Techitong Rebluud, who was only 17 when he joined the corps, "hated the Americans" and after the war when the Japanese were forced to leave he was "very sad" and would have preferred to have died with them in the war.¹³⁵

Many people, even those who began to believe that the Americans were "nice people", felt a measure of sadness when the Japanese left Palau for Japan. Others only recall their indifference and scorn for the soldiers who had added to their suffering during the long year.

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Repatriating Japanese from the Palaus and the whole of Micronesia was a mammoth task. At the end of the war there were an estimated 122,482 "oriental

¹³²Augusta Ramarui.

¹³³Dr. Minoru Ueki.

¹³⁴Francisco Morei (M 1922) : WH Interview 26 March 1985 in Higuchi, *Micronesians and the Pacific War : Interviews...*

¹³⁵Techitong Rebluud (M 1926) : WH Interview 4 July 1984 in Higuchi, *Micronesians and the Pacific War: Interviews...*

people" in the Marianas area, including 52,000 civilians.¹³⁶ The first evacuation of Japanese from Babeldaob to Malakal in preparation for the journey to Japan began in late October 1945.¹³⁷ Initially 19 war criminals were identified and "placed in custody", while 951 troops were repatriated to Japan.¹³⁸ With the arrival of the Marines, part of whose orders was to "supervise the evacuation of...Japanese from the island of Babeldaob", the process began to accelerate.¹³⁹ By the end of December 14,000 troops, in groups ranging from 315 to nearly 850, had been evacuated,¹⁴⁰ in American landing ships and a small number of Japanese escort vessels.¹⁴¹ Early in the new year only 2300 Japanese remained in Palau, held back by American authorities to act as labourers on Koror, Arakabesang and Malakal. These men were to assist with the "full scale clean up of war debris."¹⁴²

During repatriation it was noted that there were hundreds of "weakened, poorly nourished Japanese" and a number of "stretcher cases".¹⁴³ The Japanese had shared the year of bombing and famine with the Palauans and even though many Islanders considered they had added to the burdens and some sought revenge against them, others felt deep pity and sadness for their former administrators. Although the prompt return of all military personnel to Japan was the primary object, all other non-Japanese aliens, including Okinawans and Koreans, were also forced to leave Palau. It had originally been promulgated that they be permitted to remain, but in October it was decided that

¹³⁶"Oriental people" included Japanese, Okinawan, Korean, Chinese and Formosan. See Richard, *Volume 2...*, p. 26.

¹³⁷*Unit Journal, Hq 3d Bn 111th Inf.*, 19 October 1945.

¹³⁸*Ibid.* 22 October 1945 & *Official War Diary, Hq. Island Command, Peleliu*, 5 November 1945.

¹³⁹*War Diary, 26th Marines (Reinforced)*, December 1945.

¹⁴⁰*Ibid.* Referred to as "Japanese Military Personnel and Gunzokus (sic)". Gunzuko are civilian employees in military service.

¹⁴¹*Official War Diary, Hq. Island Command, Peleliu*, 5 January 1946. See Diary for January and February for individual listings of numbers of troops and vessels involved.

¹⁴²*Official War Diary, Hq. Island Command, Peleliu*, 5 January 1946. By 31 January the 26th Marines had evacuated 20,263 Japanese military personnel, Gunzokus and civilians from Palau.

¹⁴³*Ibid.*

all aliens be repatriated both for reasons of military security and because their continued presence in the islands would result in administrative and economic problems.¹⁴⁴

The official naval historian, Dorothy Richard, writes that another reason for their evacuation was that "the natives displayed antipathy toward these peoples because they continued to class them as Japanese and therefore oppressors".¹⁴⁵ My interviews with Palauans show this to be doubtful. It was often with civilian Okinawans that Palauans shared the strongest bonds. Many also still felt a link with the Japanese.

Augusta Ramarui was "very sad" to see the Japanese leave because for a long time, "they were our protectors. We loved them".¹⁴⁶ Yet, as her friend Melii Kemaem pointed out, there was also a substantial amount of fear inherent in the relationship, so there was a sense of relief too, when they left.¹⁴⁷ Mengesebuuch Yalap clearly remembers when the soldiers were gathered at the dock ready to board ships and leave Palau. She finally knew that the war and the Japanese time were over because

the Japanese soldiers were singing their goodbye song. It was a goodbye song just for the soldiers and they were singing it and since we knew what they were talking about we felt sorry for them.¹⁴⁸

Some people still felt sadness, even though they knew it was inappropriate. Mongami Kelmal was

sorry for them for a while, but how could we? They were very bad to us. They didn't treat us right. They would teach justice but not use it. So it was a silly thing to feel sorry for them.¹⁴⁹

During the war Dengelei Saburo had sometimes "felt sorry for" the enlisted men in the Japanese Army. She could see that any food that was available went to officers

¹⁴⁴Richard, *Volume 2*..., p. 34. The Commander in Chief, Pacific Ocean Areas [CinCPOA] recommended this to the Chief of Naval Operations [CNO] on 1 October 1945.

¹⁴⁵*Ibid.* p. 34.

¹⁴⁶Augusta Ramarui.

¹⁴⁷Melii Kemaem (W 1929).

¹⁴⁸Mengesebuuch Yalap.

¹⁴⁹Mongami Kelmal (M 1926).

first and the ordinary soldiers received almost nothing. On a number of occasions she gave food to such men. After the war she and other Palauans in Ngchesar began to sell food to the Japanese. They would collect and sell coconuts and when the tapioca crop was ready for harvest

we had tapioca plant and we would grind it up and put it in a coconut or a banana leaf and we would cook it...We would cook thirty of them and the Japanese people would buy them.¹⁵⁰

As the soldiers and civilians prepared to leave, they in turn sold their household goods and equipment to the Palauans - pots and pans and mattresses in exchange for the food.¹⁵¹ Mesubed remembers many of the Japanese civilians, before they left, "came to us Palauans and they told us that there are things over there...and that we can go and pick whatever we want and use it for ourselves".¹⁵²

Some Japanese and Okinawans made more personal exchanges. After the war Direou Orrukei and her family gave shelter and food to a Japanese woman and her children. The woman had lost her husband during the war and she was hungry and frightened. When it was announced that all Japanese were to return to Japan she feared for her children and how she would manage to care for them back home, so she asked Direou's parents whether they would take the children. The family at first agreed, but then heard rumours circulating that if Palauans were found looking after Japanese babies they would be punished and "we were scared because we hadn't seen Americans". So in the end they refused to take the children.¹⁵³

Japanese women also approached Anthony Polloi's family, asking them to take care of their children.

They didn't know what Americans would do with them [the children] so in the night they came and gave us three kids and we hid them. We gave them all to other families because we lived closer to the Americans camp and we did not know what they would do to Japanese so we kept hiding them out, further away from the

¹⁵⁰Dengelei Saburo.

¹⁵¹Ibid.

¹⁵²Mesubed.

¹⁵³Direou Orrukei.

American's camp. And they stayed here. They have become Palauans...Since then relatives have come and visited them and they have gone back to Japan and stayed.¹⁵⁴

A Ngermid woman who despised the Japanese for their callousness during the war felt concern for an Okinawan woman who was repatriated to Japan. Her husband had died during the war and she had a four year old son and she

gave me the boy to look after. I took care of him for four years until she came back for him and I gave him back. The funny thing was that he spoke Palauan, not Okinawan. The lady was crying for him and he didn't understand, but I was nice enough to give him back anyway. A few years ago, in the 1980s, he came back to Palau to look for me.¹⁵⁵

A number of Japanese and Okinawan mothers left their children behind in Palau, because they feared what would happen to them and believed they would be safer in Palau, raised as Palauans.

It happened quite a lot...Many Palauan women have been to Okinawa to visit their 'sons' as the Okinawan women returned and took them back there. There was even a woman who when her husband died, she was so poor she deserted her children when she left for Japan. A Palauan family...took the children in and they are still here today.¹⁵⁶

For Minoru Ueki, whose father was Japanese and mother Palauan, the situation was reversed. What the end of the war and repatriation meant to him was leaving Palau along with the Japanese. On 15 January 1946 it was decreed that all Japanese males and females, even those married to Islanders, had to return to their homelands. The "native wives and children of Japanese native marriages could remain or be evacuated with the Japanese husband as each native wife desired".¹⁵⁷ In Minoru's case there were problems and much negotiation.

It was a big problem really, because my father was Japanese and not many Japanese did that, but my father really made us citizens of Japan, including my mother. And so when the war ended we all had to go back, but then my mother's parents wouldn't give permission -

¹⁵⁴Dr. Anthony Polloi.

¹⁵⁵Woman, Ngermid.

¹⁵⁶Ibid.

¹⁵⁷Richard, *Volume 2*..., p.38. This was later also applied to Okinawans married to Islanders.

"Look this is my daughter. She is pure Palauan. She had nothing to do with the Japanese".¹⁵⁸

After much discussion it was decided that Minoru's mother could stay and the children would leave with their father. Yet this was seen as too harsh, separating a mother from all her children, so

finally they decided that only the eldest son should go. So I went. I didn't feel good about leaving my sister and brother and my mother and my relatives there, but then I had no choice. I mean we did as much as we could do to detain me, but could not do it, so I just had to take it, accept it and go off.¹⁵⁹

For Islanders like Minoru, the end of the war brought more dislocation than the beginning of the conflict.

Many other people did not realize the severity of the damage caused by the war, and the changes this was to bring, until after it was over. This was particularly true for those Islanders who had been evacuated from their homes on Koror in early 1944. Along with the 2000 Japanese workers, a number of Palauan men also moved back to Koror to help with the massive clean-up. In November 1945 it was reported that 312 male Palauans were resident in Koror, accompanied by less than 50 women and children.¹⁶⁰

Palauans remember that it was the men and young boys who were initially called to Koror to work for the Americans. Benged Sechewas' husband

worked with the men, so he came back to Koror first. It was hard because there had to be papers fixed for you and a check-up before he came across from Airai to Koror.¹⁶¹

Temel Ngirchorachel recalls that there was an announcement for men to come to Koror to have a medical examination and then go to work. For those who had not been

¹⁵⁸Dr. Minoru Ueki.

¹⁵⁹Ibid.

¹⁶⁰*Military Government Unit, Palau Islands - Monthly Report for November 1945.*

¹⁶¹Benged Sechewas.

checked at Renrak the Americans "tied a line from a tree to another tree, put a sheet over that and we all stand behind that - strip off - check-up."¹⁶²

Tents were erected in Ngermid, a village to the north of the town centre and men were assigned to construction, clean-up and agricultural work parties.¹⁶³ Baiei Babul moved to Koror in November to live in a tent in Ngermid and labour for the Americans.¹⁶⁴ Alfonso Oiterong recollects that when there was a call for Palauan labourers, many men volunteered to come and work because they were originally from Koror, or were simply "interested to see Americans."¹⁶⁵

These men were shocked to see a completely changed Koror.

The streets here [in Koror] were asphalt but when we came out, because of the air raids, the road was really bad. This was a big town. [There] was a lot of stores, bars and...some buildings were still there, but oh, it was hard to believe, it was awful.¹⁶⁶

Koror was devastated. Very few buildings were still standing.¹⁶⁷ What structures were left were badly burned and in some places still smouldering, because there were continual explosions caused by left over ammunition.¹⁶⁸ Wilhelm Rengiil recalls that during Japanese times Koror was a "small city". It was crowded with houses. He could walk all the way down many of its streets in the rain without getting wet because the houses were packed so closely together that their eaves joined. All this was "completely destroyed during the war". Very few houses were not obliterated or severely damaged by bombs.¹⁶⁹ Dengelei Saburo

blamed the Americans for all this because they came and dropped the bombs on all the big buildings and I kind of accused them. They're

¹⁶²Temel Ngirchorachel.

¹⁶³Ibid.

¹⁶⁴Baiei Babul.

¹⁶⁵Alfonso Oiterong.

¹⁶⁶Ibid.

¹⁶⁷Jonathon Emul.

¹⁶⁸Dr. Minoru Ueki.

¹⁶⁹Wilhelm Rengiil.

the reason why all these things were destroyed and demolished. The Japanese people spent time building them.¹⁷⁰

Even after the war the Americans continued to demolish Koror. A large number of the buildings left standing were unsafe and had to be torn down. Some Palauans believe that many of the buildings were structurally sound and could have been saved, but there was a misunderstanding about what was going to be done in Koror. Immediately after the war there were many problems with communication. It was also clear that the Americans were powerful and rich people. The high chiefs were consulted¹⁷¹ and at that time thought the Americans would build new and better houses so agreed that everything Japanese should be demolished.¹⁷² Therefore "the Marines bulldozed everything"¹⁷³ apart from the few concrete buildings, which were "too difficult" to clear away.¹⁷⁴

Jonathon Emul came to Koror after the war and lived in a tent amongst this devastation. He had heard rumours that if

you go to Koror, you'll be living in paradise, living with the Americans, you are an angel. It was just the other way around. When we came we had to work hard, eat C ration - they call it, military food - for one year, live in a tent, working like hell!¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁰Dengelei Saburo.

¹⁷¹The two high chiefs - traditionally of the southwestern and northeastern sections of the Palaus - Aibedul and Reklai - were consulted by Americans officials as the leaders of the Island group. See *Military Government Unit, Palau Islands - Monthly Report for December 1945* (RG 38, Box 38, Folder marked "Palaus - MG reports Nov-Dec 1945)). For a brief explanation of the traditional political system and its erosion by successive administrations see Frank Quimby & Gwenda L. Iyechad, "Belau", chapter five in Ron Crocombe & Ahmed Ali (ed.) *Politics in Micronesia*. (Institute of Pacific Studies of the University of the South Pacific, Suva, 1983) pp. 105-108.

¹⁷²See Alfonso Oiterong & Jonathon Emul.

¹⁷³Alfonso Oiterong.

¹⁷⁴Dr. Minoru Ueki. There is also a commonly told story that the first American commander in Koror was extremely anti-Japanese and therefore wished to destroy everything Japanese. Bob Owen, an American who came to Palau after the war says that this officer believed "if it was Japanese it had to be bad. With all this bombing that had gone on most of the livable houses in Koror had been destroyed but there were some left and he in his eagerness to be a great patriot he dynamited and bulldozed all the rest of the Japanese buildings". See KRW Interview 24 July 1990, Seattle, Washington. William and Henrietta Vitarelli, other Americans in Palau after the war, also talked of this. See KRW Interview 4 August 1990, Maui, Hawaii.

¹⁷⁵Jonathon Emul.

For some Palauans the joy of their first good meal in a year and the relief of finding out the Americans were not going to rape or kill them soured when they witnessed the destruction the Americans had caused.¹⁷⁶ They could see it would take many years of hard work to repair the damage and remake Palau.¹⁷⁷ Others like young Wilhelm Rengiil remained enthusiastic and hopeful about what the Americans had and what they would do. When he saw the piles of rations, the vehicles, the equipment and the troops, he believed the Americans must be very "rich" and capable. He had met people from Peleliu and Angaur on Babeldaob during the war and, not long after the Americans arrived, when the word was circulated that they were to return to their homes, he thought about their relatives on the southern islands, those who had not been evacuated and concluded that

they were really fortunate because US military invaded those places and used them as a base, so they really, you know, they were living in heaven!¹⁷⁸

As the Angaurese had found after emerging from their month in the darkness of the caves, coming out from "hell" made whatever comforts a person immediately experienced seem like "heaven". For those on Babeldaob this image was strengthened by a clear contrast between the devilish brutality of the Japanese in the last months of the war and the generosity of the Americans. This made their former enemies from the West seem like 'angels'. Yet with the passing of time, peace replaced war as the current of normal life. For some, especially those who still felt a strong association with the Japanese, heaven gradually faded to reveal the outlines of a flawed paradise.

*

The displaced people of Angaur and Peleliu also came face to face with a negative side of liberation by American forces. Coupled with the repatriation of the Japanese, an immediate task of the occupying forces was to return these people to their home islands

¹⁷⁶Ibid. & Dengelei Saburo.

¹⁷⁷Ibid.

¹⁷⁸Wilhelm Rengiil.

"whenever shipping was available and the islands could receive them".¹⁷⁹ As a result of this policy most Angaurese on Babeldaob were soon taken home.¹⁸⁰ As Peleliu was still a major American naval air base and was crowded with troops, at first, only the men were sent home to work as labourers.¹⁸¹ Women and children were not returned until mid to late 1946.¹⁸²

The Americans brought Angaurese from Babeldaob back to their homes in a number of stages. The first group to return, 204 Palauans and 34 other Islanders, landed on 25 September 1945.¹⁸³ It was noted in the Military Government Report for that month that this group was

mainly original Angaur natives who were evacuated from the island by the Japanese prior to our [American] landing. The balance have relatives residing here.¹⁸⁴

In early 1946 other individuals were repatriated to Angaur "in an effort to centralize families and groups".¹⁸⁵

On their return these people did not see Wilhelm Rengiil's imagined "heaven". Instead they were faced with destruction. Ngkeruker Salii remembers her anguish. The island "had changed totally...When we went to where our houses were standing

¹⁷⁹Richard, *Volume 2...*, p. 47.

¹⁸⁰*Enclosure (A) Military Government (Angaur and Kayangel) Report for the Month of September 1945*, dated 9 October 1945, p. 1. These individual sheets were not attached to a Military Government Report. (RG 38, Box 38).

¹⁸¹*US Naval Military Government Unit, Palau Islands - Military Government (Angaur and Kayangel) Report for Month of April 1945*. (RG 38, Box 39). In April 48 more workers were sent from Koror to Peleliu to be employed by military units there. This made a total of 151.

¹⁸²In June 1946, 149 women and children who were originally from Peleliu were returned home. *US Naval Military Government Unit, Palau Islands - Monthly Report of Military Government Activities for June 1946*. (RG 313, Box 6924). In September another 160 people were returned. *US Naval Military Government Unit, Palau Islands - Monthly Report of Military Government Activities for September 1946*. (Held at Hoover Institution).

¹⁸³*Enclosure (A) Military Government (Angaur and Kayangel) Report for the Month of September 1945*, dated 9 October 1945, p. 1.

¹⁸⁴*Ibid.*

¹⁸⁵*Military Government (Angaur and Kayangel) Report for the month of February 1946 - Enclosure (B) in Monthly Report, Military Government Unit, Palau Islands*, February 1946. (RG 38, Box 39).

before there was no house at all".¹⁸⁶ Karmelong Mengur was shocked that "not a leaf was left green. Everything seemed like it was on fire. It was like one clear desert".¹⁸⁷

Robert Eldukl, who had stayed on Angaur during the war, recalls that before the evacuees were to arrive home,

the American soldiers told us it is better not to go close to them because the Palauans who were here had received some sort of injection...and they said that the Palauans who were on their way here from Babeldaob have probably not had that injection and it would be better not to go close to them for health reasons.¹⁸⁸

However when the ship arrived and their relatives stepped off onto the beach it was a very emotional moment and "the soldiers couldn't do anything" to stop the two groups running to each other, "they just let us go".¹⁸⁹ People were "crying with happiness" at seeing their relatives again after so many months of being separated by the war.¹⁹⁰ Some learned their relatives had been killed and they "cry and cry" because they realized that they would never see them again.¹⁹¹ For those who survived there was much to tell, many stories to exchange. The vagaries of the war and of American strategy gave these groups a different history. The evacuees had experienced a further year of bombing and famine, those on Angaur had shared all that time with these new soldiers and administrators.

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When John Useem left Angaur at the beginning of 1945, the war in the Pacific was still intense. On Angaur he had established a measure of peace. While Babeldaob was still at war, the Islanders on Angaur had gradually recovered from their trauma and

¹⁸⁶Ngkeruker Salii.

¹⁸⁷Karmelong Mengur (M 1918) : KRW Interview 27 October 1990, Koror, Palau. Karmelong went with the Japanese to New Guinea during the war and after the surrender was returned as a prisoner to Angaur and then to his home, Ngermid, Koror. The experiences of Palauans who served with the Japanese overseas will be discussed briefly in Appendix A.

¹⁸⁸Robert Eldukl (M 1917).

¹⁸⁹Ibid.

¹⁹⁰Mathias Akitaya (M 1928) & Masao Guiliberte (M 1922).

¹⁹¹Sister Elene Ebud (W 1917).

settled into the routine of a new life. During the eight months before the surrender the number of personnel involved in military government duties on the island gradually decreased from four officers and 21 enlisted men in January 1945 to 1 officer and 9 men by August.¹⁹² In May 1945 Islanders under military government on Angaur totalled 338 - including those who had emerged from hiding on Angaur and those who had escaped from Babeldaob or were brought in from smaller nearby islands.¹⁹³ The leaders of each Islanders' group, selected during Useem's command, had been re-elected by the people in a "chief's election" in April.¹⁹⁴

Islanders were well settled in their new village. A 10 bed hospital had been established in the camp at the end of 1944¹⁹⁵ as some people were still suffering the effects of the deprivations of war; with slowly healing war wounds and malnutrition as well as scabies and ringworm.¹⁹⁶ In April, 175 people were being treated for symptoms of yaws.¹⁹⁷ The Military Government unit continued to hand out free food - "rice, corned beef, canned salmon, bread and tea".¹⁹⁸ However the Islanders gradually took over more and more of the task of caring for themselves.

Within the restrictions enforced by the continuing war, fishermen went out in canoes when they could and provided food both for themselves and the armed forces. In June, for example, they were able to fish on 24 days of the month securing 1735 pounds of fish - 193 pounds for Americans forces and the rest for their own consumption.¹⁹⁹ The catch improved "100%" with the use of a diesel powered launch

¹⁹²Richard, *Volume 1...*, p. 622.

¹⁹³*Military Government - April Monthly Report on, Headquarters Army Garrison Force, Angaur, 5 May 1945. p. 1 (RG 38, Box 38).*

¹⁹⁴ Ibid. See also Richard, *Volume 1...*, p. 628.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid. p. 630.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷*Military Government - April Monthly Report on, Headquarters Army Garrison Force, Angaur, 5 May 1945. p. 1.*

¹⁹⁸ Richard, *Volume 1...*, p. 630.

¹⁹⁹*Enclosure (A) Military Government Report for June Part 1 (Angaur) dated 8 July 1945. Not attached to MG Report. (RG 38, Box 38).*

provided by military government.²⁰⁰ Other Islanders (114 men and 44 women in April 1945) worked for the military government in various roles including general maintenance and rehabilitation, in the water and power plants, as carpenters, laundry workers, teachers, cooks or in making handicrafts to be sold to the armed forces.²⁰¹

Masao Guiliberte recalls that

the Americans tried to give us jobs. People were working - even like some in the tents there would be a cook, cooking for the camp and he would get paid. Even for me, working in the hospital I would get paid. The Americans kind of encouraged us to do that. There were also people teaching at the schools. But those who didn't have any jobs, the Americans administration encouraged them to do handicrafts, even selling shells and the Americans would buy them.²⁰²

In July 1945 many people were employed "as laborers in connection with the construction of the new village".²⁰³ On 27 July Islanders moved from the second village camp established by Useem to the accommodation area left empty by the 494th Bombardment Group. This meant a move from tents to quonset huts.²⁰⁴ At this time too, all military police, who had been "stationed in the village for protection against intruders"²⁰⁵ were withdrawn.²⁰⁶

While the adults worked to rehabilitate their island, the children attended school five days a week from 8:30 am to 3:30 pm. In August 52 students were enrolled in six grades learning "elementary English grammar, English reading, penmanship, arithmetic

²⁰⁰*Enclosure (A) Military Government Report (Angaur and Kayangel) Report for the Month of August 1945 Part 1* dated 10 September 1945. Not attached to MG Report. (RG 38, Box 38) In August, using the launch over the same number of fishing days, the catch was 4085 lb, 3545 lb for Islanders and 540 lb for the armed forces.

²⁰¹*Military Government - April Monthly Report on, Headquarters Army Garrison Force, Angaur*, 5 May 1945, p. 4. Some also were sent to Peleliu to work. In April \$383.35 worth of handicrafts were purchased from Islanders.

²⁰²Masao Guiliberte.

²⁰³*Military Government Report for the Month of July (Angaur)* dated 6 August 1945 (RG 38, Box 38).

²⁰⁴Ibid.

²⁰⁵*Military Government - April Monthly Report on, Headquarters Army Garrison Force, Angaur*, 5 May 1945, p. 1.

²⁰⁶*Military Government Report for the Month of July (Angaur)* dated 6 August 1945.

and drawing" under three "native teachers" supervised by the military government.²⁰⁷ Three times a week transport was "furnished so that natives can attend American movies" and on other days, "the native Baseball team plays the military government unit teams...and has proven itself a good match for them".²⁰⁸

Despite sharing work and recreation with Americans, Mathias Akitaya felt that there was still little time really to get to know them

because during the daytime we would work with them and after all work is work and beside that [there was the] theatre - the movies. They would drive us up to the theatre and we would say a thing or two at that time, but besides that there is not much time, because the war is still going.²⁰⁹

Nonetheless, when the evacuees from Babeldaob arrived at the end of September 1945, the Angaurese had spent nearly a year re-establishing daily life on Angaur, adapting to American ways and rules. In September 1945 they were already living in quonset huts in the new village site. Robert Eldukl recalls that while the people who had stayed on Angaur stayed in

the quonset, with the tin roof...the people from Angaur who came from Babeldaob stayed in those wooden houses...The quonsets were for the Air Force and when they left we were able to occupy them. The wooden houses were constructed for health facilities...for wounded soldiers.²¹⁰

For the new arrivals there was much adjustment to a completely new Angaur. This transition was made less frightening because they could see clearly how healthy and safe their relatives were. Ngkeruker Salii remembers there were many soldiers around. There was "a station" near to the new village, and there were also "people who

²⁰⁷*Enclosure (A) Military Government (Angaur and Kayangel) Report for the Month of August 1945. Part 1*, dated 10 September 1945. p. 2.

²⁰⁸*Ibid.*

²⁰⁹Mathias Akitaya.

²¹⁰Robert Eldukl.

stayed on the other side".²¹¹ She and the other women were warned "not to go around by ourselves and if we did to have a man with us [because] the Navys have left their homes a long time ago."²¹² However, the Angaurese mostly told her "nice things about the Americans". She heard how the soldiers had cared for the Palauans when they emerged from the caves, how they had given them food and shelter and even clothes to wear, just as they had after the war ended on Babeldaob.

During the war Ngkeruker, unlike many Palauans, had maintained her faith in the Japanese despite their cruel demands. She had felt "we had to hide ourselves to be out of the way so that the Japanese can fight the Americans and they will win the war".²¹³ Returning home, hearing about and experiencing the generosity of the Americans she found that she began to consider "the Japanese as very low life, because they were cruel people, not like the Americans".²¹⁴

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The Islanders repatriated to Peleliu had no-one with long term experience of the Americans to turn to for information. There, as in Angaur in October 1944, Palauans had to adapt themselves gradually to a very different life. They too faced the initial shock of seeing their island devastated by American artillery and weeks of bloody combat.

From the deck of an American landing craft, a few miles from his home island, Tutii Ngirutoi looked out across the ocean. He was bewildered because from there he "could see through Peleliu to Angaur". This had never been possible before. Now

²¹¹Ngkeruker Salii. One group was Naval Military Government and the others further away may have been the 54 officers and 1,200 enlisted men (with 4 Navy officers and 29 enlisted men attached) of the 7th Anti-Aircraft Artillery Battalion USMC who were still on Angaur as of 30 April 1945. See Fleet Marine Force Status 30 April 1945 in W. Victor Madej (ed.) *U.S. Army and Marine Corps Order of Battle Pacific Theater of Operations 1941-1945 Volume 1* (Game Publishing Company, Allentown, 1984) p. 164.

²¹²Ngkeruker Salii.

²¹³Ibid.

²¹⁴Ibid.

everything was "completely different".²¹⁵ When she reached the island one woman remembers

I could just stand on the beach and look over Peleliu to the other side because there were no trees left. I didn't want to see Peleliu like that...I am from Peleliu, I grew up there [but] at the time when I returned I didn't even know where to locate my house because everything was all messed up. There were no trees, no nothing, not anything to show you where to go and I even got lost in my own place.²¹⁶

The island was "like a field". There was only "the ground" with no trees.²¹⁷ Nothing was green but instead was powdery white. White phosphorus from incendiary shells and flares coated everything.²¹⁸ Fumio Rengiil found it impossible to find where his house had been because "everything was flat and no big trees and no small mountain - all flat".²¹⁹ Obechou Delutaoch "felt bad because it was my original place and I don't want to see it like that".²²⁰

On Peleliu the soldiers distributed food and helped Islanders to settle into their new village which lay amidst a small military town of quonset huts. Obechou Delutaoch at first had no real impression of what Americans were like.

I guess it was alright for them. They won the war over the Japanese and they took over the land, but for me I didn't notice anything of them - their characteristics, their attitudes...The only thing that I began to notice was they did not abuse people. They didn't use beatings...They were easy-going people and they didn't always have to scold people or demand something from people. They just let us do whatever we had to do.²²¹

In these early days the people of Peleliu, Angaur and Babeldaob did not yet know what it was they had to do.

²¹⁵Tutii Ngirutoi.

²¹⁶Woman, Peleliu.

²¹⁷Obechou Delutaoch.

²¹⁸War Chronicles, Episode 12 : *The Bloody Ridges of Peleliu*. (Written by Don Horan, Lou Reda Productions, 1983).

²¹⁹Fumio Rengiil.

²²⁰Obechou Delutaoch.

²²¹Ibid.

The end of the war marked the conclusion of the Japanese period and the beginning of a new, more open life. Palauans had lived for 30 years under the dominant, coercive and very ordered Japanese system of government. The war itself further confined Islanders. For more than a year their daily life was tightly controlled to maintain survival. Japanese rules became more rigid and compassionless and air raids enforced external control over how and where people lived. With the end of hostilities these controls were suddenly lifted. After the initial food distributions and medical examinations, in the attitudes and actions of the Americans many Palauans

sensed a little freedom, but in Palauan ways that means ignorance. If you don't speak to somebody else and you just let somebody do their own thing at their own will, it's ignorance.²²²

In early 1946, "when everything was settled down, when we finally realized that peace was here", Skesuk Skang went to Koror to visit her children who had moved there to work.²²³ She saw that there were many Americans around and was "afraid of them". She saw that everything the Japanese had built was gone and the Americans had only just begun to rebuild. Everything was changed now, turned upside down and there was nothing she could do about it. "It was a fact of life. The Japanese left, the Americans came so [we] had to adjust to them".²²⁴

Skesuk had entered the new world of Palau at peace, a place of freedom and plenitude that was created at the beginning of the American occupation - the "Navy times". Yet this was not to last. As Americans themselves adjusted to the end of the war, sending home their troops and material, Palau was to become for the United States only a tiny outpost, inhabited by a small group of Navy men and five thousand Palauans who wanted to know what the future would bring.

²²²Ibid.

²²³Skesuk Skang.

²²⁴Ibid.



Figure 1: A view of pre-war Koror.



Figure 2: Postwar Koror - Palauans living in American tents [Note Navy clothing].



Figure 3: The Black Land turned White - Peleliu after the battle.



Figure 4: The first Islanders to emerge from the caves.



Figure 5: Useem's first camp.



Figure 6: Lieutenants John Useem (right) and Francis Mahoney (left) in discussion with Islanders soon after their emergence from the caves.



Figure 7: First distribution of clothes at Useem's camp.



Figure 8: Children on their way to the first school classes [Note child in front of column is wearing a white navy hat].



Figure 9: Morning exercises.



Figure 10: Men from Useem's military government team.

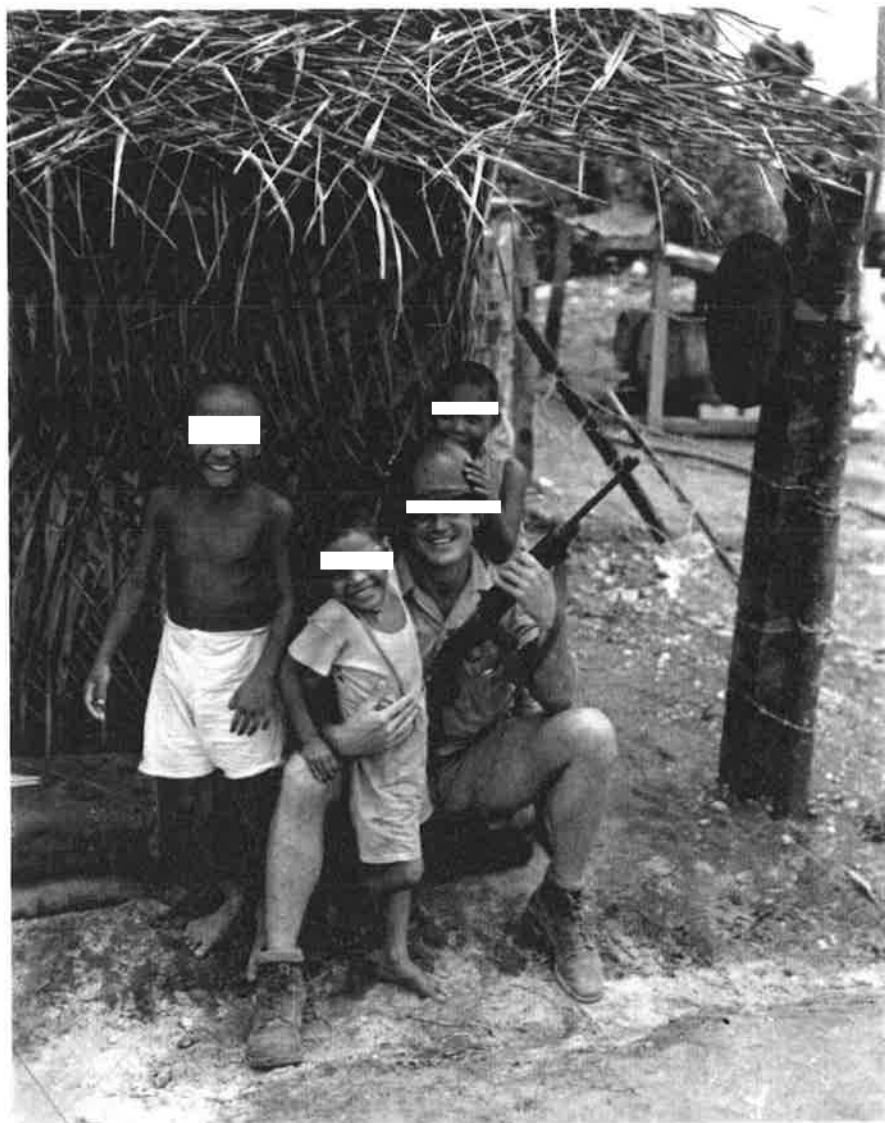


Figure 11: Security guard and friends outside Useem's quarters.



Figure 12: Quonset housing on Angaur, 1946.

Part Two

THE OTHER SIDE

Reconstruction in Palau
1946 - 1951.

PROLOGUE

As early as March 1945, Admiral Ernest J. King, Chief of Naval Operations, stated that "the United States should keep the Pacific bases for which it had paid by the sacrifice of American blood".¹ Before the end of the war and for some time afterwards there was much debate between the Department of State and the military, as well as between the Navy and the Army, over the future status of the Micronesian Islands, particularly about whether they should be retained in civilian or military hands.² For this reason the navy's wartime military government role was extended into peacetime until the Trusteeship Agreement was signed on 18 July 1947.³ Once this Agreement came into effect Micronesia became a strategic Trust Territory of the United States.⁴ That same day military rule was terminated and the civil administration of the former Japanese Mandated Islands was "placed in the hands of the Navy Department, on an interim basis".⁵ There was some opposition to navy rule⁶ and just seven months after the Trusteeship Agreement was made formal, President Truman ordered the Department of the Interior to begin planning for the time when administrative responsibility would be transferred to it.⁷ This occurred officially on 1 July 1951.

¹As quoted in Richard, *Volume 2...*, p. 63.

²Nufer, pp. 42-43.

³Richard, *Volume 2...*, p. 87.

⁴The Trusteeship was designated "strategic" because the agreement between the United States and the United Nations involved the Security Council rather than the General Assembly of the UN. Also certain articles in the agreement gave the US as "administering authority" broad powers over the area. These included Article 3 : "full powers of administration, legislation and jurisdiction over the territory" and Article 5 : the entitlement "to establish naval, military and air bases and to erect fortifications in the trust territory" and "to station and employ armed forces in the territory" to assist in "the maintenance of international peace and security". See Nufer, pp. 28-29.

⁵*Ibid.* p. 45.

⁶*Ibid.*

⁷*Ibid.* p. 46.

From the beginning of its administration and for its nearly eight years in Micronesia and Palau, the navy was influenced by the "interim" and temporary nature of its role. This feeling seeped down to the navy officers and enlisted men on the ground in Palau and was reflected in constantly changing personnel and lack of concrete development.

At the end of 1945 the US Naval Military Government Unit in Palau was based at Koror with a representative at Angaur. As Peleliu was the location of the Naval Air Base, the vast majority of Islanders were not allowed to return home until mid 1946, so a military government representative was assigned to Peleliu only in November that year.⁸

The last occupation forces withdrew from Koror in February 1946, leaving the island with a gradually shrinking group of naval personnel under the command of Captain A. J. Byrholdt (October 1945 - April 1946). Postwar demobilization reduced the unit from 75 (11 officers and 64 enlisted men) in March to only 23 (3 officers and 20 enlisted men) in June. Lieutenant Commander Carroll D. Anderson, who had been Byrholdt's executive officer, was at the helm during this lowest point of naval government in the Palaus (May - September 1946). His main concerns were the simple necessities of transportation and supply.⁹ Basic relief and reconstruction, maintaining and increasing the number of schools and continuing programmes for teacher and police training set up under Byrholdt's command also occupied the men of this small outpost. Conditions improved at the end of his term when, in September, graduates of the recently established School of Naval Administration at Stanford University began to arrive in the islands.¹⁰

Commander William C. Ball, who took over from Anderson, was a graduate of SONA 1 - the initial class of naval personnel to pass through the instruction

⁸Richard, *Volume 2...*, p. 207.

⁹See Military Government reports for this period.

¹⁰*US Naval Military Government Unit, Palau Islands - Monthly Report for September 1946*. p. 1. (Held at Hoover Institution).

programme.¹¹ During his tour, October 1946 - October 1947, the number of officers and enlisted men assigned to Koror lifted and levelled out, averaging about 17 and nearly 40 respectively.¹² Although there were still problems with transportation and communication during his first months the increased manpower meant that more work could be done. In October 1946 field trips to the outer islands and to northern Babeldaob were inaugurated, as was a programme for training nurses and medical practitioners.¹³ Many Palauans, *too* many in the opinion of Commander Marianas, to whom the Palau unit answered,¹⁴ were working for the administration and relations between Islanders and Americans were considered to be "amicable".¹⁵ By June 1947, it seems that there was a balance between progress and problems.¹⁶ At the end of Ball's term the quarterly report noted that "Acculturation is proceeding in the Palaus".¹⁷

Commander Chelsey M. Hardison, a graduate of SONA III,¹⁸ arrived in Palau after the change-over to civil administration. During his tour of just under two years, personnel numbers remained steady, except that the number of enlisted men assigned to the unit was cut by half in July 1948.¹⁹ This period began to see more problems, particularly involving intoxicants, the conduct of American personnel, (those stationed

¹¹Richard, *Volume 2...*, p. 163.

¹²See Appendix C for numbers of officers and enlisted men 1945-1951.

¹³*US Naval Military Government Unit Palau Islands - Monthly Report of Military Government Activities for the month of October 1946*, p. 5. (Held at Hoover Institution).

¹⁴*Second Endorsement to MGU Palau Is. Monthly report for January 1947*, p. 1. (RG 313, Box 6925). Commander Marianas considered that the "over-employment of natives...retards the rehabilitation of the permanent local economy".

¹⁵*US Naval Military Government Unit Palau Islands, Monthly Report of Military Government Activities for month of January 1947*, p. 13. (Held at Hoover Institution).

¹⁶See Military Government Monthly Reports for this period and particularly *Military Government Unit, Palau Islands - Quarterly Report of activities for April, May and June 1947*, pp. 18-19. (RG 313, Box 7787).

¹⁷*US Civil Administration Unit, Palau Islands - Quarterly Report of Activities for Quarter Ending 30 September 1947*, p. 18. (Held at Hoover Institution).

¹⁸Richard, *Volume 2...*, p. 170.

¹⁹See Quarterly Reports for this period.

in the Palaus and those from visiting ships), and the behaviour of young Palauans.²⁰ Other troubles related to living conditions, particularly the extreme shortage of water between December and April.²¹ Yet it was noted with pride that postwar reconstruction and "rehabilitation" was, in the Palau of mid 1948, "a thing of the past".²²

Commander A.D. Curtis replaced Hardison in mid 1949 and served until the end of navy government in July 1951. He headed a unit which discouraged its personnel from "co-mingling" with Islanders "except as is necessary to performing their duties and preserving the good-will of the natives".²³ During this time problems raised in early years by alcohol and cross-cultural sexual relationships reached serious proportions. Recreation facilities for naval personnel were limited and there was much complaint about there being, "literally nothing to do in the line of entertainment".²⁴ The main characteristic of this last naval administration was its move to solve the problems of the past by separating itself into a purely American quarter of Palau at "Topside", near the village of Ngermid.

There was a pattern drawn by naval administration in Palau. It started with a battle to pick up the pieces left by the war - repatriating Japanese and Islanders, disposing of war debris and rebuilding the basic necessities of modern life - homes and schools. This was carried out by a small band of men (mostly in Koror), with whom some Palauans began to establish ties. With the coming of the SONA men, who in some cases were accompanied by their wives, the picture broadened and began, at times, to include the rest of Palau. For a brief honeymoon period there seemed to be a kind of progress and for Palauans there was some excitement and anticipation, particularly for the young, in discovering the American way of life. The close contact

²⁰*US Civil Administration Unit, Palau Islands - Quarterly Report of Activities for October, November, December 1947*, p. 19. (Held at Hoover Institution).

²¹*US Civil Administration Unit, Palau Islands - Quarterly Report 2-48, January, February, March 1948*, p. 25. (Held at Hoover Institution).

²²*US Civil Administration Unit, Palau Islands - Quarterly Report 3-48, April, May, June 1948*, p. 3. (Held at Hoover Institution).

²³*US Civil Administration Unit, Palau District - Semiannual sanitary report for the period ending 31 December 1949*. (RG 313, Box 7146, Folder - Semi-Annual Reports).

²⁴*Statement of Gerald Alan Unzicker, DKS, USN, in relation to his recommended discharge, May 1950*. (RG 313, Box 7150, Folder - Separation).

between some Palauans and Americans however soon brought about an uglier side to the story. As a result, the later naval administrators had to turn back to trying to pick up pieces, but this time, it was those created by peace and change. In this period the navy did not always approach the tidying up process in a very effective manner.

Throughout this era, western influence in Palau was not entirely naval or military. US civilians lived in Palau, working for the United States Commercial Company, the prime mover in re-establishing the economy. Civilians were also involved in the development of education. In addition, people visited Palau for varying lengths of time for an assortment of other purposes. These people were observers of both sides of life in Palau - that of Palauans and of the navy - and of the ways they related to each other.

Among Palauans today, the ups and downs of the navy period are not clearly delineated in memory. The image varies with the person. Some were far more involved in American life in Palau than others. There is a strong impression though of "nice" Americans, nice but not doing all that much. Comparisons are often made with Japanese times when Koror was a city of paved roads, shops, bars and restaurants - a *Japanese* town, but also a place where there was employment and money could be made and saved and things could be bought. The Koror of American navy times was built of quonsets and war salvage and its most exciting offering was not of the real world but of the fantasy world - the movie theatre - a place that attracted many Palauans, some seeking entertainment, some English lessons, some answers.

Answers were slow in coming. In its temporary role the navy could not offer many. In the initial period, prior to the influx of SONA graduates, there was also nothing but very basic communication between Americans and Palauans. Some places were left out of touch, due to the shortage of transport and most Islanders and Americans found each other in some sense finally unreachable because of the lack of a common language, even when they lived and worked in the same place. During the first postwar year the biggest problem for both the Palauan and American inhabitants of the Palau Islands was that they were, in more ways than one, islands without boats.

Chapter Five

ISLANDS WITHOUT BOATS

**Starting to Rebuild
January - October 1946.**

[The Americans] didn't rebuild anything, just the streets, the road - that was the main thing they were working on. Right after the war it was a man and his house - he had to rebuild.¹

I was a policeman...we were only watching those warehouses, because people were still in Babeldaob - not many people chose to come back to Koror, except people of Koror, so a few scattered. It was almost a ghost town after the Japanese went back to Japan, because imagine that we had about 40,000 Japanese here in Koror, all of a sudden the town was empty when we came back, ruin after ruin...when I was a policeman, nothing to guard, nothing to watch except a few supply compounds by the American soldiers.²

All the roads which were asphalted during the Japanese administration were destroyed and paved with gravel...during the navy time - nothing, nothing else...³

Japanese time there were many Japanese, many activities, many economic activities. Japanese were working for themselves and there were stores all over, while during the navy time it was just empty, nothing!⁴

[The Americans] had a few trips to Melekeok. They came to look at the injured people and cure them...There were a lot of them in Koror, so maybe those who were in Koror knew about them, but I didn't really see them.⁵

It was the doctor at Renrak, he was the first American that I saw...For those of us who were at Ngchesar that was only the first time we ever saw an American and then we would return back to Ngchesar and we wouldn't see anybody so there were probably more of them that came to Koror, but for me, that was all.⁶

Only a couple of times I saw them when they would come and look around. I heard of them being at Ngermid.⁷

¹Mereb Eruang (M 1914).

²Jonathon Emul (M 1927).

³Wilhelm Rengiil (M 1929).

⁴Dr. Minoru Ueki (M 1930).

⁵Direou Orrukei (W 1925).

⁶Dengelei Saburo (W 1930).

⁷Mesubed (M 1922).

*

Palau native leaders are expressing the fear that the United States will not be sufficiently interested in this area to develop it and to send out Americans from whom they can learn.⁸

More ships and more boats are essential.⁹

Officers on board as of 1 July [1946]:

The Commanding Officer

One (1) Medical Officer

One (1) Warrant Pharmacist

It should be pointed out and emphasized that it is impossible to do an adequate military government job with the officers now assigned.

Enlisted Men:

...On board 1 July

Hospital Corpsmen ----- 5

All other rates ----- 15

Total-- 20

There has been no radio communication at this station....There is no yeoman and no electrician's mate. Relief is urgent.¹⁰

*

In his report for the month of February 1946, Captain Alfred J. Byrholdt, Deputy Chief Military Government Officer of the the Palau Islands Unit, recorded that "all repatriation was completed and on 26 February the last ship left".¹¹ With the departure of the last Japanese, a period in Palauan history closed. Its reverberations were to be felt in many different ways for a long time.

The legacies of war continued to control the activities of Americans and Islanders. Cleaning up debris and rebuilding homes occupied most people, including those working as labourers for military government in Koror. Daily life could still be

⁸Naval Military Government Unit, *Palau Islands - Monthly Report of Military Government Activities for Month of June 1946*, p. 2. (RG 313, Box 6924).

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹US Naval Military Government Unit, *Palau Islands - Monthly Report for February 1946*.

dangerous. On 17 February a woman burning refuse on Babeldaob was killed when buried anti-aircraft material exploded.¹²

That same month, the 26th Marines left for San Diego¹³, and by March the demobilisation points system meant that many navy men were also heading home, seriously depleting the number of military government personnel and therefore the rehabilitation work that could be done. The occupation period immediately after the surrender displayed an America rich in manpower, machines and food supplies. During December 1945, Palauans were still receiving food relief from "old army stock on Peleliu", but they were also being "instructed that they must work on planting gardens" to provide food for themselves.¹⁴ Trade stores began to be established to replace free food, and in Koror each person was expected to pay two dollars, "with which to purchase an initial inventory of goods" to stock the Koror store.¹⁵ In March, military government reported that supplies allocated for these new stores were "almost exhausted" and the "time of arrival of new goods is indefinite".¹⁶ The monthly report also complained of other shortages. While the recommended number of personnel required to run the unit was 35, not including those assigned to medical work, the Koror unit was already down to 22 men, excluding hospital personnel, with another 6 expected to leave in May.

Attention is invited to the fact that the crew remaining aboard is not only extremely short of total man power, but it is also entirely lacking in certain essential rates. It is impossible to maintain communications, vehicles, generators and boat engines without trained personnel. Military Government here cannot function successfully with the present crew. There has been no radio communication to this station for more than a month and it appears that there will soon be no transportation or electricity.¹⁷

¹²Ibid.

¹³*War Diary, 26th Marines (Reinforced)*, 5 March 1946.

¹⁴*US Naval Military Government Unit, Palau Islands - Monthly Report for December 1945.*

¹⁵*US Naval Military Government Unit, Palau Islands - Monthly Report for March 1946.* (RG 38, Box 39).

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Ibid.

Over the next few months the situation became much worse. By June the number of personnel in the Palaus had dropped even lower and the only available LCM "developed serious leaks", leaving no vessel available to make trips between Peleliu, (the island to which all supplies were delivered from Guam) and Military Government Headquarters in Koror.¹⁸ In July Byrholdt stated that with these "serious" supply problems, "this activity really knows what it means to be at the end of the line".¹⁹

The shortages were mainly a navy problem and at the time few Palauans were aware of the details. What does emerge from interviews with Palauans about this time is a contrast between their impressions of initial contact with Americans and those of the following years under Naval Military Government. In the occupation period memories are of plenitude and safety after starvation and fear, and the unexpected kindness of the many Americans. When asked what happened after that, the broad impression given is very little, sometimes "nothing". For example, Dengelei Saburo feels that the Americans "just came and they bombed out everything, our houses, our *Abai* and...left [it] like that."²⁰

For many, especially those not employed in Koror, the Americans seemed to disappear. The shortage of personnel meant that field trips to Babeldaob were few. The situation was not rectified until September 1946 when the SONA trained officers began to arrive. This empty period from the end of 1945 to September 1946 meant that, after initial contact, people on the big island rarely or never saw Americans.²¹ For many Palauans on Babeldaob, after the shock of the ending of the war and of meeting their new rulers, the beginning of navy administration was a non-event.

Only Palauans who worked in Koror had regular contact with Americans. They were therefore more aware of any developments that took place. Palauan men had been brought to Koror to help with reconstruction. In April the administration was paying a

¹⁸*Naval Military Government Unit, Palau Islands - Monthly Report of Military Government Activities for Month of June, 1946.* LCM is a naval abbreviation for Landing Craft, Mechanized.

¹⁹*Naval Military Government Unit, Palau Islands - Monthly Report of Military Government Activities for Month of July 1946.* (Held at Hoover Institution).

²⁰Dengelei Saburo. An *Abai* is a meeting house.

²¹See for example Direou Orrukei, Skesuk Skang and others living on Babeldaob.

total of 463 employees an average wage of 35 cents per day plus food.²² Much "emphasis was placed on the necessity for training natives to do satisfactory work with less supervision", because there was a lack of naval personnel to take charge.²³ In addition to basic rehabilitation work, the navy set about training Islanders to take over mechanical duties, as there were not enough officers or enlisted men to keep the available road and water transport operative.²⁴ The other major fields in which Palauans became involved were education and security. Training for these positions brought people to Koror and into continuous contact with the small group of Americans that were left.

Setting up schools was one of the first tasks undertaken by military government.²⁵ The main aim of this was to increase the use of the English language amongst Palauans, as lack of communication was proving a difficult problem. Very few Palauans spoke English and nearly all the *nisei* interpreters had been repatriated away from Palau.²⁶ As he was "the only one who knew English", Pastor Fey was recruited and brought to Koror to act as an interpreter for Commander Byrholdt.²⁷

Even before the end of 1945 it was noted that a number of schools were due to open in the new year, including a main Normal School to be located in Koror. In the meantime naval officers and enlisted men were conducting classes in English five or six nights a week.²⁸ A survey of all English-speaking Islanders had been made in November in preparation for the "establishment of a formal Military Government

²²US Naval Military Government Unit, *Palau Islands- Monthly Report of Military Government Activities for April 1946*. (RG 38, Box 39).

²³Ibid.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Richard, *Volume 2...*, p. 372.

²⁶US Naval Military Government Unit, *Palau Islands - Monthly Report for February 1946*.

²⁷Pastor Wilhelm Fey.

²⁸US Naval Military Government Unit, *Palau Islands- Monthly Report for December 1945*.

educational program on Babelthuap".²⁹ Non-English speaking Palauan men and women were also selected to be trained as teachers.³⁰

Melii Kemaem remembers that she was chosen by her village in Ngchesar to come to Koror and train as a teacher. Everybody knew the students who had been the "bright ones" in Japanese school and they were the first to be selected.³¹ Ascension Ngelmas recalls that "there was a decree in Airai, pointing at me saying 'You go be a teacher'". She thinks she was chosen because she "knew how to write ABC at the time", having learned the alphabet from a Spanish missionary.³²

Wilhelm Rengiil was in one of the first groups to be called up to learn English.

We were called because they knew that those people who went to that Japanese school [Vocational School] were selected - cream of the crop, so to speak, so we were called to go and learn, start learning English. So we went and I still remember the Captain - Captain Evening. He was our teacher and then we start learning the words - 'Good Morning, Good Afternoon'.³³

At navy headquarters, near the northern end of Koror island, tents and quonsets housing the administration and mess hall³⁴ were located on a section of land which ironically still displayed the remains of a large Japanese shrine.³⁵ Each evening Wilhelm went to a tent near the headquarters to learn English. He lived with the other teacher trainees in a military tent in the same area. Nearby there was more temporary accommodation for police trainees. He went to the mess hall for meals and enjoyed large amounts of American military food. There was little time for anything except

²⁹*US Naval Military Government Unit, Palau Islands -Monthly Report for November 1945.* (RG 38, Box 38, Folder marked "Palau - MG reports Nov-Dec 1945).

³⁰*Ibid.*

³¹Melii Kemaem (W 1929).

³²Ascension Ngelmas (W 1915).

³³Wilhelm Rengiil (M 1929).

³⁴*US Naval Military Government Unit, Palau Islands - Monthly Report for November 1945.*

³⁵This was the remains of a shinto shrine, the *Kampe Taisha Nanyo Jinja*. The "grandest shrine" in Micronesia, it was built by the Japanese in 1940. The shrine was mostly untouched by American bombing, but parts of it were removed by the Japanese in 1944. The name Jinja means 'assembly place of the gods'. See Shuster, "State Shinto in Micronesia...", p. 20, 27 & 36. Many Palauans referred to this shrine area as 'the House of the Gods'.

study, as after just three months the trainees were sent back to villages on Babeldaob to teach Elementary School.³⁶ Wilhelm was selected to assist in the establishment of the Airai Elementary School.

In February 1946, school supplies had been scavenged from the "various Palau units" still present, in order to provide enough equipment to begin teaching.³⁷ The next month, only seven weeks after construction began, nine schools on Babeldaob were finished, including one in Airai. Built by Palauans under contract, payment was made by military government to the two high chiefs, Aibedul and Reklai. The nine schools cost the Americans 350 cartons of cigarettes, 560 pounds of candles and nearly 1700 pounds of soap!³⁸

The main Koror school was opened on 11 March 1946, housed in the partially repaired former Japanese civilian hospital in the centre of the old town.³⁹ There too, teachers were still being trained to work in the quickly growing number of schools. In March it was reported that 981 children were already attending schools with 31 teachers spread over Babeldaob. In addition 67 students started school in Koror and ten teachers were still in training at Koror Normal.⁴⁰

When Wilhelm Rengiil started teaching, in Palauan and very basic English, he continued to attend an evening class in Koror. It was a busy and challenging time.

We teach during the daytime, go to night class in the evening to learn how to...prepare and teach the next day!....We were given a military [book called] 'Daily Conversation'. Its a small pocket book and we used those as a textbook during those times.⁴¹

³⁶Wilhelm Rengiil.

³⁷*US Naval Military Government Unit, Palau Islands - Monthly Report for February 1946.*

³⁸*US Naval Military Government Unit, Palau Islands - Monthly Report for March 1946.* A monetary cost of \$401.80.

³⁹*Ibid.*

⁴⁰*Ibid.* There was also a total of 140 students attending schools on Angaur and Kayangel.

⁴¹*Ibid.*

While Palauans were under instruction, the shortage of staff meant that navy headquarters staff also had to "devote part-time to teaching, in addition to their regular duties".⁴²

The United States Commercial Company, (formerly the Foreign Economic Administration, which had worked with the navy during the war), continued to cooperate with military government in Micronesia, assisting with postwar economic rehabilitation. It was responsible for the

sale of civilian supplies, purchasing and marketing of copra and native handicraft and development of industries and enterprises which could ultimately be turned over to native ownership and management.⁴³

Within the newly established schools, military government also appointed "school handicraft teachers" who, with the advice of Palau's USCC representatives, trained students to make marketable goods such as "cigarette cases, paintings, pocket books, fans". These were produced for sale to military government personnel in Koror.⁴⁴ However, as the numbers of military began to decrease the market for the "curio and souvenir items" collapsed and Islanders were then encouraged to make "products having utility value", such as woven floor and table mats "for which there is a demand outside the area".⁴⁵

Schools were also ordered to establish gardens and in March they were supplying fruit and chickens to the officers mess and the hospital.⁴⁶ Some time also had to be spent in cleaning up war debris. At the Koror school "protruding air raid shelters" had to be removed. Students were "required to spend one hour daily cleaning the area" and helping with "general landscaping".⁴⁷

⁴²US Naval Military Government Unit Palau Islands - *Monthly Report for March 1946*.

⁴³Richard, *Volume 2*..., p. 422.

⁴⁴US Naval Military Government Unit, Palau Islands - *Monthly Report for March 1946*.

⁴⁵US Naval Military Government Unit, Palau Islands - *Monthly Report of Military Government Activities for May 1946*. (RG 38, Box 39).

⁴⁶US Naval Military Government Unit, Palau Islands - *Monthly Report for March 1946*.

⁴⁷US Naval Military Government Unit, Palau Islands - *Monthly Report of Military Government Activities for May 1946*.

As early as March, a bus service using old Japanese trucks was organized in some areas, including Aimeliik and Koror.⁴⁸ In May all buses and their drivers became the responsibility of each school district rather than of military government.⁴⁹ Within just a few months, the new teachers' growing proficiency in English allowed them to act as interpreters when military government required. In mid 1946, all people with yaws were evacuated to the so-called "Sick Village" in Airai and the teachers were used as interpreters to explain this relocation to the patients.⁵⁰

The school system was a microcosm of the Palau that navy military government aimed to create, an island peopled with Palauans, who had some command of English and who could complete the rehabilitation of their island. They would successfully run economic ventures to support themselves, and to supply goods for the administration and for export. However, resources were extremely limited in many areas. Most particularly the lack of American personnel to supervise and train people retarded development. Many planned building projects "were delayed by return of experienced personnel to the U.S." and military government had decided that "natives work well only when continuous supervision is supplied".⁵¹ Having always been told what to do and how to do it by their Japanese administrators, Palauans were probably unsure of what Americans wanted and were, at that time, tentative about working without direct orders.

In the area of education the loss of personnel also affected development. On 17 June 1946, the education officer left Palau for discharge from the navy and there was no-one available to take over the task except the new commanding officer's wife, Mrs. Carroll D. Anderson.⁵² As well as a shortage of teaching staff there was a lack of teaching materials. In August 1946 "Promotion Exercises" were held at each of the

⁴⁸US Naval Military Government Unit, *Palau Islands - Monthly Report for March 1946*.

⁴⁹US Naval Military Government Unit, *Palau Islands - Monthly Report of Military Government Activities for May 1946*.

⁵⁰Ibid.

⁵¹Ibid.

⁵²US Naval Military Government Unit, *Palau Islands - Monthly Report of Military Government Activities for June 1946*. Mrs. Anderson's own name is not given.

schools. Lt. Commander Anderson attended the programmes at three of the schools and reported that

The programs were opened with the singing of *America*. Prizes were distributed to honor students in each grade followed by speeches given by the principal, school superintendent, High Chief and visitors. It was gratifying to see the keen interest of all the people in education and to realize that so much has been accomplished in organizing schools.⁵³

He also stressed, however, that "Much more help is needed in obtaining suitable books and supplies and in training teachers".⁵⁴

Like Wilhelm Rengiil, Alfonso Oiterong recalls that this shortage of staff and textbooks meant that he was learning English himself for "a couple of hours", at the same time as he was going out to teach in Elementary school. Alfonso's "real purpose" in leaving his labouring job and volunteering for teacher training had been to learn English.⁵⁵ As late as October 1946 the administration reported that the "outstanding want in education in the Palaus is English. There are few English teachers available and they are concentrated in Koror".⁵⁶

A number of the Palauans who came to Koror to labour or train in fields other than teaching, also worked to gain some basic knowledge of English. Others managed to communicate through gestures, simple sign language and a few limited words. Although Mereb Eruang came to Koror as soon as he heard that Americans were looking for men to work, he did not ever learn more than a few basic words of English. "There were a couple of Palauans who knew some English and that is how we would communicate"⁵⁷.

⁵³*Naval Military Government Unit, Palau Islands - Monthly Report of Military Government Activities for Month of August 1946*, p. 3. (Held at Hoover Institution).

⁵⁴*Ibid.*

⁵⁵Alfonso Oiterong (M 1924).

⁵⁶*Naval Military Government Unit, Palau Islands - Monthly Report of Military Government Activities for October 1946*.

⁵⁷Mereb Eruang (M 1914).

When Mereb arrived in Koror he applied to train as a policeman. He was issued with a uniform and taught "how to shoot guns, and how to take them apart".⁵⁸ The American officer who was in charge of the training was "nice" to the Palauan recruits, but Mereb felt that it was mainly because "he believed that Palauans were low-life and they don't know any better, so he was easy on us".⁵⁹ Discipline was reasonable; the main rules were against drinking liquor and staying up late. Most police were assigned to work as night watchmen. Mereb's main job was looking after the weaponry - taking guns apart, cleaning and reassembling them. There was little crime to contend with in Koror as there was not much happening there at all. He recalls that there were no stores and little to buy with his wage except cigarettes. The Americans were only rebuilding the road and putting up quonset huts. He was surprised because "during Japanese times all the way from here [Ngermid] to the end of Koror there were houses, one after the other, but not during American time". He began to think that "maybe it is not the American style".⁶⁰

When Tutii Ngirutoi first came to Koror from Ngaraard after the war he remembers that "there were a lot of Americans that I heard of, but not that I saw".⁶¹ However once he was chosen to train as a policeman he spent more time with navy people. Tutii had been a policeman under the Japanese and recalls harsh discipline, especially for drinking. "They would beat us or throw us into jail so we then had to be re-hired".⁶² As a policeman for the Japanese administration "we were really errand boys". After the war

It was very different. The navy's were very nice. They gave us uniforms and they gave us guns. They would train us. We felt like real policemen...They would tell us things like how to handle guns. They let us handle them but we were told not to point at anyone. They taught us how to defend ourselves.⁶³

⁵⁸Ibid.

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰Ibid.

⁶¹Tutii Ngirutoi (M 1919).

⁶²Ibid.

⁶³Ibid.

The police instructor spoke in English and Tutii was "able to listen a little bit, understand but not speak".⁶⁴ Watching American supply warehouses and conducting night patrols occupied most of a policeman's time. Jonathon Emul recalls that the instruction programme was like basic training for the military because every day trainees would run long distances and practice shooting as well as developing other skills such as extinguishing fires. He learned almost no English then, except "the names of the parts of the gun, ammunition and trigger - that's all they taught us".⁶⁵ He was living in a tent in Ngermid with other policemen, eating with the people in the nearby mess hall. Jonathon had come to Koror alone in search of employment so that he could earn money for his family. His mother had died just before the end of the war, "of malnutrition and jungle sickness", leaving his father to care for the young children.

They were very small after the war and my father didn't want to remarry until the children grew....he was a good father...my sisters and brothers and I lived separately for quite some time.⁶⁶

In March 1946 the monthly Military Government report recorded that "regular training of native police was continued" and that "no serious crimes or disorders occurred", except for "three (3) arrests for stealing".⁶⁷ Theft, particularly illegal confiscation of former Japanese (now government) property, reckless or drunken driving and disobeying military government orders were the most common offences. Occupancy of the jail averaged about 10 persons a month.⁶⁸ As well as making such arrests, the Koror police force was commended for doing "excellent work" in quickly

⁶⁴Ibid.

⁶⁵Jonathon Emul (M 1927).

⁶⁶Ibid.

⁶⁷*US Naval Military Government Unit, Palau Islands - Monthly Report for March 1946.*

⁶⁸See *US Naval Military Government Unit, Palau Islands Monthly Reports* - from March 1946 through to October 1946.

putting out fires. A blaze that started in the BOQ, (Bachelor Officers' Quarters) in April was swiftly extinguished and the building was saved "without extensive damage".⁶⁹

In May 1946 the first Native Court was convened, supervised by military government and comprising eleven Palauan judges, "sitting under the informal supervision of the Palau High Chiefs". The initial case was one of attempted rape for which the sentence was thirty days in jail and a \$7.50 fine.⁷⁰ The courts dealt with most crimes involving Palauans, but none involving Americans. Mongami Kelmal, a policeman at the time, recalls that, like the courts, the Palauan police

only worked for Palauans because at that time all the Americans were soldiers and it was against the rules to touch any American soldier because they were stronger than the Palauans.⁷¹

The administration however, referred Palauan cases "to the native court wherever possible" with the aim "of teaching the Palau people self government and to strengthen the authority of the courts".⁷² One of the more common cases to come before the court was illegal fishing with explosives. In October 1946, more than a year after the surrender, left over wartime ammunition was still a danger. During that month

Fifty-two (52) unexploded bombs and land mines were disposed of...These unexploded bombs present a constant problem on Koror and Babelthuap. The abandoned stores of Japanese grenades are particularly dangerous as the natives continue to fish with them. Native chiefs are cooperating in turning in offenders but it is impossible to find and destroy these supplies.⁷³

As serious crimes were few, jail sentences were light, mostly less than 60 days.⁷⁴ Karmelong Mengur was arrested a number of times during the Japanese administration, but never during navy times.

⁶⁹US Naval Military Government Unit, Palau Islands - Monthly Report of Military Government Activities for April 1946.

⁷⁰US Naval Military Government Unit, Palau Islands - Monthly Report of Military Government Activities for May 1946.

⁷¹Mongami Kelmal (M 1926).

⁷²US Naval Military Government Unit, Palau Islands - Monthly Report of Military Government Activities for October 1946.

⁷³Ibid.

⁷⁴US Naval Military Government Unit, Palau Islands - Monthly Report of Military Government Activities for July 1946.

In Japanese times if you are a problem, everyone is going to know that you are a problem. You are going to have to be dealt with, abused...If you did something, they had to make sure you felt that you were wrong....They would just slap us across the knees and put handcuffs on us and off you go.⁷⁵

Jail terms were harsh in Japanese times. Karmelong recalls that as a prisoner he was beaten, stripped down to his underwear and "for 29 days you just had to sit on a square of cement". Under the Americans, Karmelong spent a short time in jail when he returned to Palau in 1946, after serving with the Japanese in New Guinea during the war. The policemen who were Palauan were "nice" and "even if you were a prisoner you didn't have to feel like you were a prisoner".⁷⁶ People who were in jail were used by military government on labouring projects, such as digging drainage ditches along the roads into Koror and working on a new airstrip.⁷⁷

Many Palauans who worked in Koror saw a clear difference between the way they had been treated by Japanese and the way they were treated by Americans. Karmelong moved to Ngermid because "there were not enough workers" and the Americans were asking people what skills they had. As he was able to drive, he was told to work at the power plant.

I liked it a lot because it was easy work. Even though I was out in the power plant I would stay out of the sun. They wouldn't make me lift very heavy things like they would in the Japanese time.⁷⁸

Wages were small - three dollars a month initially and then in the second month six dollars, but it was

more than enough because what they gave me were so many cartons and cases of cigarettes and big boxes of clothes, all kinds of clothes, even ones I had never seen before. They'd put it in a box, put it in front of me and say, "Take what you want."⁷⁹

⁷⁵Karmelong Mengur (M 1918).

⁷⁶Ibid.

⁷⁷*US Naval Military Government Unit, Palau Islands - Monthly Report of Military Government Activities for May 1946.*

⁷⁸Karmelong Mengur.

⁷⁹Ibid.

Not long after he started work, Karmelong remembers that one day he was taken to a warehouse to choose some new shoes. The officer opened the door and inside were hundreds of shoes and he was told to "pick". The generosity of the Americans "shocked" him.

Despite communication difficulties Karmelong spent a substantial amount of time with the Americans he knew from the plant. The "swabbies" lived in Ngermid, and Karmelong saw them most nights.⁸⁰ He brewed liquor from grapes the Americans brought over and from pineapples and sold it back to the men for five dollars a gallon. Baiei Babul, who also worked at the power plant, recalls that the "ordinary soldiers" were not allowed to drink whiskey, only beer, so they often sought out more alcoholic liquor from the Palauan brewers. Baiei "hung around with them, but there was not much conversation". Mostly he would go with them to buy alcohol from the brewers, who made a stronger Japanese drink called *moromi*.⁸¹ For Karmelong this meant that "the ordinary soldiers would hang out over there at my house". Sign language was the usual means of talking with each other and he recalls that "at night it was harder to communicate because we couldn't see the hands!"⁸²

One Ngermid man remembers that there was a "center" near the jail and police station, where Palauans, particularly those who were policemen, associated with Americans.⁸³ During the earlier period when food was still being distributed he remembers

We got to know each other very well in a short time because some American soldiers were Japanese Hawaiians and they knew how to speak Japanese and...they would translate for us...We would just go and talk to them. They were very nice people and easy to get along with.⁸⁴

⁸⁰"Swabbies" is a colloquial term for enlisted navy men.

⁸¹Baiei Babul (M 1921).

⁸²Karmelong Mengur.

⁸³Man, Ngermid (1919).

⁸⁴Ibid.

He felt that with "Palauans and Americans" there was

an equality between them unlike during the Japanese time where there were Palauans, and there were Japanese. There was a wall in between them. Wherever the Americans go we would all go with them...We didn't know the language or anything, but we would just tag along.⁸⁵

People's attitudes towards Americans varied. Opinions were based on personal experience and individual response. Baiei Babul also spent quite a lot of time with Americans. There wasn't much to do, "except on Sundays when we would take a walk around the town". Otherwise they would just "hang around" the hospital together after work. Baiei had been living in a tent with other workers and then he was moved to a quonset next to the hospital. Despite his regular association with Americans, Baiei still felt at a distance from them. He believes this is because

maybe the Palauans and the Japanese were one people, because even after all the things that went on during the Japanese times, I and the Japanese people were closer, in the way that we were able to speak to each other...With the Americans its different - they're Americans - I felt much closer to the Japanese people because I could communicate with them.⁸⁶

Tutii Ngirutoi and Mereb Eruang, working as policemen at Ngermid, had regular contact with Americans, but Mereb stresses that "there was not much communication going on".⁸⁷ Tutii would apply what little English he had learned in talking to the enlisted men. Often he would join them, just "chatting and walking around", but he only "picked up bits and pieces" of what they were saying. He recalls that most of it "was really way over my head!"⁸⁸ Yet, unlike Baiei, he felt that "with Americans we could walk down the streets with them and they would not make us feel so low. The Americans would ask us what we would like, what do we want to do".⁸⁹

⁸⁵Ibid.

⁸⁶Baiei Babul.

⁸⁷Mereb Eruang.

⁸⁸Tutii Ngirutoi.

⁸⁹Ibid.

Tutii and Baiei hold different views of the "wall" between Palauans and their administrators because they are looking from different angles. After the war Baiei "felt hatred for the Japanese people". Yet despite the harshness of the Japanese system of government he feels that Palauans and Japanese were close in a way Palauans and Americans were not. The very fact that everyone was forced to learn the Japanese language meant that all Palauans could understand what was being said and what they were being told. Baiei "had the thought that [Americans] were nice people" but because "I wasn't able to speak with them", he felt he could not "think much about them".⁹⁰

Tutii could not speak to the Americans either, but to him that was not so important because he did feel a new sense of equality. The lack of common language meant that much of the time he had little idea of what was going on, but he sensed freedom and liked to be asked what he wanted to do. For many other Palauans these new American ways were very attractive, but because they could not understand the language they were afraid of not knowing what was being said or what was happening. Under Japanese administration, people were told, in a language they could understand, what the Japanese believed they needed to know. Japanese actions were always clear - there was no need to ask why. With Americans the question was always there. For many Palauans in Koror seeking the answer meant spending as much time as they could in the company of Americans, to learn English and to begin to understand American intentions.

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In the Koror of 1946 there was very little to do for entertainment except wander around with the Americans.⁹¹ The only major gathering places were the movie theatre and the occasional USO shows that visited the islands.⁹² For Palauans these could provide many insights into American culture. On 6 May, the "first USO shows ever to

⁹⁰Baiei Babul.

⁹¹Ibid.

⁹²USO is the United Service Organization which organized entertainment for servicemen, bringing various entertainers into nearly all theatres of operation, however remote. Perret, p. 468.

visit Military Government Koror played to overflow houses".⁹³ It was noted that in addition to naval personnel, 500 Palauans attended each performance. Repairs to the stage and lighting fixtures were carried out and a new dressing room was built for the performers. Two weeks after the first presentation a vaudeville show attracted another 500 Islanders.⁹⁴

It was the movie theatre, however, that was the "centre of attraction" during navy times.⁹⁵ The average nightly attendance at the movies amongst Palauans in mid 1946 was 200.⁹⁶ By May, movies were so popular amongst the Palauan workers and trainees in the Koror area that a weekly schedule was printed in Palauan.⁹⁷ Nearly all Palauans who lived in or visited Koror during this period have some recollection of going to the movies. Some thought they were seeing the real America. Baiei Babul watched a lot of cowboy movies during the time he was working in Koror and wondered whether in the United States, "Americans shot people for real, as a game."⁹⁸

Anthony Polloi was about 10 years old in 1946 and often accompanied his father to Koror. He was fascinated by everything that was new and American. "I wanted to mix with a lot of what was going on. There were a lot of things to see". During the week he attended Airai Elementary School but on weekends he would come to Koror. He recalls that early in the American period, when there were many soldiers around and ships coming in, there was a big choice of movies to see.

If there were six ships there were six movies to choose from. And if there were more groups of soldiers coming and settling in one place, there would be another movie for that group of soldiers, and another movie for still another group of soldiers.⁹⁹

⁹³*US Naval Military Government Unit, Palau Islands - Monthly Report on Military Government Activities for May 1946.*

⁹⁴*Ibid.*

⁹⁵Wilhelm Rengiil.

⁹⁶*US Naval Military Government Unit, Palau Islands - Monthly Report on Military Government Activities for May 1946.*

⁹⁷*Ibid.*

⁹⁸Baiei Babul.

⁹⁹Dr. Anthony Polloi (M 1936).

Westerns were most common and he remembers seeing a Gene Autry film. Another man who worked at Ngermid has memories of "cowboy movies, gunshots and horses". Such entertainment was "very popular at the time, [but] they were American movies so we didn't understand them".¹⁰⁰ Nobody could follow the dialogue and when the characters in the movie "started boxing each other" Anthony Polloi recalls that many people

were commenting that they didn't like some of the actions because it was short-lived and so fast. The Japanese movies - the plot was longer and they used a lot of songs in between so if somebody said, "I love you", he's got to sing his "I love you". They would go around a tree before they finish the song so it was more sustained. The western movies were more short-lived because you just come and argue for a little bit and get a pistol and just go! It ended so quickly!¹⁰¹

Japanese movies manifested the clarity and order Palauans were used to, while the quick and confusing American films with dialogue no-one could understand reflected the new order of things. Despite the unfamiliarity of the style Islanders regularly went to pictures. While she was in Koror for teacher training, Ascension Ngelmas attended many shows but "only...to watch to learn more English. I didn't go there to watch for entertainment".¹⁰² Alfonso Oiterong went to movies up at Topside. The navy men screened films "practically every night and everybody could go".¹⁰³ Later the theatre was moved down into the centre of Koror near the building which then housed the Koror school. It was "cheap" and became a place "where we really learn about Americans".¹⁰⁴ Temel Ngirchorachel learned some of the little English he knew at the cinema, watching Roy Rogers movies. The enlisted men would "sit at the back and swear". He heard such expressions as "son of a bitch" and copied them, not always using what he had learned in the most appropriate ways!¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁰Man, Ngermid.

¹⁰¹Dr. Anthony Polloi.

¹⁰²Ascension Ngelmas.

¹⁰³Alfonso Oiterong.

¹⁰⁴Ibid.

¹⁰⁵Temel Ngirchorachel (M 1928).

American films took Palauans into "a totally different world....compared to the Japanese world".¹⁰⁶ Karmelong enjoyed the excitement of it. "That was our hang out every night. Even a couple of hours before the movie started we would be sitting down. It was so crowded".¹⁰⁷ Some things were too strange to be accepted comfortably.

What shocked me the most were the other females, ladies from other places and being able to see their figures, their legs...In Japanese times we had movies, theaters...but if it was a dancing movie, everybody would be in uniforms to dance, but they would be long, the skirts would be down to here, and their hair would be all fixed up.¹⁰⁸

Women on the American screen were seldom as well covered and Karmelong found the experience disconcerting. "We had to hide our faces...when they were wearing bathing suits. We were ashamed to look".¹⁰⁹

For Rose Adelbai movies which reminded her of the recent past were most unsettling "especially the movies about wars. I didn't really feel comfortable watching".¹¹⁰ One woman even recalls the night when they showed "a World War Two movie of the actual war in Peleliu".¹¹¹ Ironically the American films that were shown seemed to reflect the journey Palauans had to take from a difficult past into a confusing and uncertain present.

Movies were screened almost every night during early 1946 and were only interrupted when in late June there was no transport available to bring film from Peleliu to Koror.¹¹² Disruptions continued during July when the lack of a regular supply boat

¹⁰⁶Karmelong Mengur.

¹⁰⁷Ibid.

¹⁰⁸Ibid.

¹⁰⁹Ibid.

¹¹⁰Rose Adelbai.

¹¹¹Woman, Ngermid (1922).

¹¹²US Naval Military Government Unit, Palau Islands - *Monthly Report of Military Government Activities for Month of June, 1946.*

between the two islands resulted in a serious shortage of all supplies.¹¹³ The absence of gasoline meant no work could be done on road maintenance. Lack of naval personnel to operate transport and generators nearly brought the whole island to a standstill.¹¹⁴

When military government was at this lowest point, John Useem once again arrived in the Palau Islands. This time he did not come as a military government officer, but as an observer, a researcher with the United States Commercial Company Economic Survey team. The team's task was to "undertake an economic survey of Guam and the former Japanese Mandated Islands in order to assist the Naval Military Government in its task of administering these islands".¹¹⁵ In its July report military government recorded the arrival of the USCC group at Koror on the 17th, noting that the during their stay the scientists "covered" Koror, most of Babeldaob and some of the outer uninhabited islands.¹¹⁶

Useem remembers that mid 1946 Palau was a "gloomy and very sad" place. Physically, Koror was "bleak" - a shanty town of bombed out and burned Japanese buildings and military quonsets.

Americans were now located in Koror...They were living in quonset huts under very primitive conditions. Transportation was bad, supplies were inadequate, unpredictable. They got things they didn't order - the whole network that was built in World War Two suddenly fell apart...There were no medical officers, there were no books, there was no basic equipment and the morale was - "we're going to do something God damn it, but we can't do an awful lot". And the natives were getting very restless across the country. We had defeated this gigantic wonderful Japanese organization with all our great military and suddenly it was all gone and all we had were bailing wire and a few things, so morale was not very high.¹¹⁷

¹¹³US Naval Military Government Unit, *Palau Islands - Monthly Report of Military Government Activities for Month of July, 1946*.

¹¹⁴Ibid.

¹¹⁵Introduction to Douglas L. Oliver, *Planning Micronesia's Future : A Summary of the United States Commercial Company's Economic Survey of Micronesia, 1946*. (University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu, 1971) p. xi.

¹¹⁶Ibid.

¹¹⁷John Useem.

Useem also sensed some nervousness amongst the officers in Koror. It stemmed from their feeling that "they were going to be judged for their performance and they didn't have the tools to do the job".¹¹⁸ During his stay Useem visited every district and village in Palau to make a complete census of the islands. It was a new journey for him - "I had never been in Koror or Babeldaob, all I had been in was Angaur".¹¹⁹

At the time of Useem's arrival Jose Tellei, who had assisted him in Angaur, was working for the navy government. When he heard that Useem had arrived he left his job and joined him as a helper. Other people who knew Useem from his time on Angaur also asked to work for him and he ended up with a group of over 30 people. He recalls that his second trip to Angaur caused some embarrassment as all the people who had known him during the traumatic period of wartime military government stopped work and "followed me around as long as I was there, with gifts and food". This made the American administration

very unhappy...I didn't do it, but they insisted on staying with me and I offered to pay them and no-one would take any money. They said "No - you've made your contribution". So I had a large staff of unpaid people.¹²⁰

During his travels around Palau and his discussions with many people, the old and young, those who had begun to form ties with Americans and those who had hardly seen them, Useem sensed that "the people were anxious" and they were "waiting". Many felt they were on the brink of transition, but did not really know where the changes would take them. They were, he recalls,

sitting there, waiting...without property, without compensation, without returning the Japanese money, no resolutions who owned the land, what land they could have and no jobs except for a few who could work in Koror...no imports, no exports...people at that point were saying we're going to have a future, we're determined to have a future - give us this and this...and everyone was asking and there was very little in the way of back-up support.¹²¹

¹¹⁸Ibid.

¹¹⁹Ibid.

¹²⁰Ibid.

¹²¹Ibid.

Useem felt that the "handful" of American officers in Palau in July 1946 "were fairly sound". They "knew their business" and "went about it with what they had, which was extremely little". As a former military government officer, Useem could appreciate the mammoth task they had before them and saw that they worked very hard. Where he had been overwhelmed by the demands of war they "were overwhelmed by the problems of reconstructing a whole society with very little to work with".¹²²

In 1946 Useem saw that Palauans were in "deep puzzlement and confusion as to what was going on". Under the Japanese, Palau had become a modernized society based on capitalism and most people believed that the Japanese were the "most advanced, most developed" people. Then at the end of the war, "suddenly the Japanese were simply not there at all" and there was "a huge vacuum". In his report for the USCC survey he wrote that

The Japanese influence was not primarily that of an Oriental culture, but more that of a colonial capitalistic one. Hence its imprint on native society is more discernible in terms of the motivations and aspirations of a nascent capitalistic social order than of any other form. The pivotal values of Palau society are now oriented around the norms characteristic of western capitalism: Namely improvement in levels of living, acquiring of property and wealth, technical efficiency, occupational skill etc.¹²³

This was the vacuum left by the departure of the Japanese and into it came the Americans. Useem believes Palauans then began to "decide slowly, it wasn't a quick process" that "maybe the Americans were a bigger power - therefore they must be richer".¹²⁴ My interviews with Palauans suggest that in many cases the process was swift, inspired by the image of powerful, rich and safe America that came with the surrender. Many Palauans made a shift, a "switch" as Useem saw it, towards faith in the Americans and how much more they could deliver than even the Japanese. The puzzlement Useem sensed amongst Palauans grew because it was taking a long time for

¹²²Ibid.

¹²³John Useem, *Report on Yap, Palau and the Lesser Islands of the Western Carolines, Part II PALAU* - No. 6 USCC Economic Survey of Micronesia 1946. p. 65 (RG 38, Box 2).

¹²⁴John Useem.

the Americans to deliver, and the number of things and people seemed to be getting smaller in mid 1946 rather than larger.

Raymond Fosberg, a botanist and part of the USCC team, gathered the impression that Palauans in 1946 "hadn't...recovered their self-assurance".¹²⁵ He felt that they were expecting to be told what to do by the Americans as they had by the Japanese - "they were not asserting themselves very much. They were accustomed to being bossed around." Things were in a transitional stage. When Fosberg visited Peleliu and Angaur he remembers looking out across the bow of the landing craft as they approached the islands, and

there were trees, but on the shore we found that these were dead trees and vines had grown up over them so they looked like living trees.¹²⁶

This image might stand as a metaphor for the Palauan condition one year after the war. On the surface many had accepted and clothed themselves in all the things Americans could provide. Yet underneath there were still strong repercussions from the old world, from thirty years of being Japanese-Palauan. There were also responses generated by the recent past, two painful years of surviving the ravages of war and the massive changes brought by this other world of peace. Beneath the feeling that Americans were "nice people" was a fear of what that could mean, where and how far it would take them.

The American influence in these early navy days was limited in scope. As Useem saw it, there was "very uneven exposure".¹²⁷ There were Americans in Koror where they had their headquarters. There had been Americans for some time on Peleliu and on Angaur, but beyond these centres there were no Americans in residence at all. Hence people like Augusta Ramarui in Ngchesar or Skesuk Skang in Ngarchelong

¹²⁵Raymond Fosberg : KRW Interview 15 June 1990, Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of Natural History, Washington DC.

¹²⁶Ibid.

¹²⁷John Useem.

seldom saw Americans and only made contact with them when they themselves visited Koror.¹²⁸

In his USCC report Useem wrote

Palau people viewed the coming of the Americans with hopefulness, once the fear of Americans dissolved. The end of the war marked the end of the split of Palau into two portions: that under American control and that under Japan. The end of the war meant that once more foreign goods would be available and the pre-war way of living would be re-established. Disillusion over the failure of America to meet these shortcomings is softened by the belief that the present shortcomings are but a temporary lapse due to abnormal circumstances which will soon be rectified.¹²⁹

These shortcomings were gradually overcome as 1946 turned into 1947 and '48. Many Palauans began to experience more substantial and lasting benefits from the American administration. Ironically though, just as the war had created two Palaus, peace and reconstruction were to bring about another two - the American Palau of Angaur, Peleliu and Koror which sent tendrils across the channel to the southern most areas of Babeldaob - and the other Palau of central and northern Babeldaob and Kayangel; a Palau that only saw Americans occasionally as they passed through on field trips delivering information and medicine. If people there wanted to be a part of the American Palau (and not all did), they had to send family members to Koror to get work, to spend time with Americans and thereby make a connection. The different ways in which these connections were formed and the problems and changes they brought about were integral in shaping the islands through the rest of the naval government period.

Karmelong Mengur feels that during Japanese times Palau "was compacted - although there was a big space we all had to squeeze in. We had to be really careful". The Americans brought about "an open world".¹³⁰ For Palauans and for Americans this turned around and the "open world" was to become, in many ways, confusing and difficult to handle. To find control and seek a future, to understand what was

¹²⁸From Interviews with Augusta Ramarui and Skesuk Skang.

¹²⁹Useem, *USCC Report...*, p. 67.

¹³⁰Karmelong Mengur.

happening and what was going to happen, many people wanted to cement their relationships with Americans and their roles in American Palau. The Americans were now the "administering authority" of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands, of which Palau was a part, and the future of Palauans was partly in their hands. For many Palauans then, in 1947 and beyond, the path into this new world began at Topside.

Chapter Six

THE WORLD BEGINS AT TOPSIDE

"Navy Times"
1946 - 1951.

Toward the end of 1946, a correspondent for *The Christian Science Monitor* returned from a tour of postwar Micronesia. In an article published that December he asked

Which group will stand the test of naval mg the better: the Micronesian peoples, or the MG officers?¹

He summarised the drawbacks and problems faced by navy military government men in the Pacific: the lack of regular mail, shortage of inter-island shipping and the main "subject of complaint" all over the Pacific, the fact that there was so little in the way of "stateside" entertainment except "Class C" movies.² He noted that instructors at the School of Naval Administration at Stanford warned new officers heading out to the islands that as well as the administrative skills they had learned they would also need "tact, perseverance and great patience".³ Not all the officers and enlisted men in Palau in 1946-7 possessed these qualities. Boredom, curiosity and sometimes just friendliness led many to seek their entertainment beyond the confines of the base. On the other side there were also Palauans who wanted to know more about the American way of life and sought to establish ties with the new occupiers. The circumstances of Palau just over one year after the war brought the two groups together.

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We all went to the movies. There were friends of ours that were older than us and...there was one Palauan with these navys...So we got in the car and since we didn't even know what was going on, he told us that "oh, we're going to drop you home", but instead of coming this way, they went that way and that's why we were scared...The Palauan man and the driver were out front and I and my friend were at the back with the other soldiers and they made a

¹"Pacific Military Government Challenges Navy" in *The Christian Science Monitor*, Wednesday 4 December 1946. MG = military government.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

pass at us, grabbing our hands...So when the soldier reached out for me I took his hand and bit it so hard that he let go, so we jumped out!...They were driving back and forward looking for us...They left after a while because they knew we...probably ran away already so we came out from the bushes and started heading home, but every time we would see a light, a car light, we would jump in the bushes again and wait for it to pass. We did that until we reached home.⁴

Mengesebuuch Yalap, who was living in Ngermid while she attended school in Koror, recalls that "a lot of girls from this village" dated navy men. The incident she describes occurred when she and her companion accompanied some older girls, "girlfriends of the navys", to the theatre. It was also "the usual thing" for unmarried navy men to come down to the houses in Ngermid to visit and "check out the girls".⁵ These were mostly enlisted men and Mengesebuuch remembers they were all wearing "those white navy hats". It was primarily women in their twenties who spent time with American men. Mengesebuuch was only about 17-18 at this time and she did not date Americans because she was too frightened. Often though, she and her friends "tagged along" with the older girls while they waited at the laundry to meet their dates, because when the navy men arrived "they brought goodies [candy etc.], so there might be a chance that they would share" with the younger girls.⁶

Receiving presents from Americans was sometimes a problem. There was a big warehouse store⁷ near the police station at the entrance to Ngermid and Mengesebuuch would occasionally ask for money from her uncle to go and buy things.

We would go to the store with only a quarter for only a pair of shoes, but since the navys knew we were the young ones at the time, they would give us material, sheets and other things like that, but we were afraid that if we took them, they might come after us, because it was a thing at the time that the navys would grab us.⁸

⁴Mengesebuuch Yalap (W 1929).

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Probably the Navy PX store, the general purpose warehouse and store for navy personnel. PX is a military abbreviation for Post Exchange.

⁸Mengesebuuch Yalap.

Mengesebuuch says that the "grabbing" was only "fun and games" with young girls like herself, because the navy men were more seriously involved with older women. However, on one occasion, she and her friend were so nervous about receiving these gifts that they dumped them onto the ground outside of the trainee nurses' quarters, then ran and hid, waiting to see "if the soldiers are going to run after us". This led them into further trouble because the soldiers took the goods to Mengesebuuch's uncle and she was scolded for throwing them away.⁹

According to many Palauans, women training as nurses or working at the laundry were most likely to become involved in relationships with Americans.¹⁰ The majority of navy men had Palauan girlfriends, recalls Jonathon Emul. If he and his friends wanted access to liquor they could usually get it through a Palauan girl, because she could get it from her American boyfriend.¹¹ The navy store would sometimes give goods out for nothing, "especially if you were girlfriend to one of the navys."¹²

Some women were actively encouraged to make a more lasting connection with an American navy man. Mengesebuuch was told by an older woman in her family to "go and get an American baby", but she was much too afraid. She remembers many families "didn't want us [girls] to date Palauan men, they wanted us to date Americans. They wanted white babies".¹³

In mid 1947, Military Government reported that, in general, relations between Americans and Palauans were good but added that "Children [are] being born of mixed

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰For example see comments made by Mengesebuuch Yalap, Alfonso Oiterong (M 1924), Rose Kebekol (W 1922), Skesuk Skang (W 1914), Ascension Ngelmas (W 1915), Woman, Ngermid (1922). Military Government introduced a programme for training nurses in October 1946. See *US Naval Military Government Unit Palau Islands - Monthly Report for October 1946*.

¹¹Jonathon Emul (M 1927).

¹²Ascension Ngelmas. Goods were distributed freely to everyone during the initial occupation period until late 1945, but by the beginning of 1946 Islanders were expected to make some payment for goods. See *Military Government Unit, Palau Islands - Monthly Report for November 1945* and *US Naval Military Government Unit, Palau Islands - Monthly Report for February 1946*.

¹³Mengesebuuch Yalap.

parentage and their care is a problem".¹⁴ For Palauans these children were not a problem. Tivedakl Olblai feels that

we admired the babies because they were different and their fathers are handsome...and they are American so they might turn into something new, grow into somebody different from what we had been seeing.¹⁵

Homer G. Barnett, an anthropologist who did research in Palau in 1947-48, was told by a Palauan woman in Ngaraard that the reason white babies were sought after was because they would have American blood in them. Many people, he was informed, believed that "the blood will improve Palauans".¹⁶ He found that Palauan women

very much want to have children by Americans, even if it means not being married...they admire American things and ways and think the blood will do it...[They] are proud of the American look of their kids.¹⁷

There "were a lot of Americans at that time that had babies" recalls one woman who settled back in Ngarmid after the war. Many of the "high class" American men, the "doctors and the carpenters", also had relationships with Palauan women and fathered children. It was when she began to see some of the young girls becoming pregnant that she decided "Americans were nice people, not killers!"¹⁸

Pregnancy and birth of a mixed parentage child did not result in marriage. The unwed mothers cared for their children, or if they wished to return to work, the grandmothers usually took over the caring role.

It often was not clear whose child it was anyway. It was an adorable thing to have a white baby. Everyone was all adoring to

¹⁴US Naval Military Government Unit, *Palau Islands - Quarterly Report of Activities for Quarter ending 30 June 1947*, p. 18.

¹⁵Tivedakl Olblai (W 1917).

¹⁶Homer G. Barnett, *Palau Journal - Non Material Culture, Book 3*, date 5/10 [1948] p. 170. (Series III, Box 2 - Palauan Notebooks, Barnett Papers, Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC).

¹⁷Homer G. Barnett, *Palau Journal - Non Material Culture, Book 3*, date 5/7 [1948] p. 157.

¹⁸Woman, Ngarmid.

have white children. They were first class children, no matter what!¹⁹

On some occasions mothers did try to seek some form of assistance from the fathers of their babies. A 27 year old woman approached Commander Hardison in December 1948,

asking for assistance in obtaining support for her child claimed to have been fathered by Robert Leroy Bechorn...formerly a member of the 30th Engineers based on Malakal.²⁰

Hardison confirmed that the baby girl was "definitely of a caucasian father" and requested from the father "a settlement of two hundred dollars", which he pointed out, "is customary in such cases". The woman involved agreed to this arrangement.²¹

Requests for financial assistance to support children became common from women who had gained clearance from the administration in Koror to go and seek employment in Guam. During his term of office, Commander Curtis wrote to the civil administrative representative on Yap, in answer to his questions regarding the advisability of allowing Yapese to work in Guam. Curtis pointed out that

During the period of transition from Military Government to Civil Administration the policy of granting clearance to Palauans desiring to go to Guam for employment was instituted. Within a short time the problems resulting from this policy were soon evident. Many Palauan young women were returning to Koror pregnant, and requesting Civil Administration to arrange for some type of payment. They in turn have formed a dissatisfied group...²²

These problems led Curtis to suggest that only men and married women be permitted to seek work off-island.²³

Benged Sechewas feels that at the time many Palauans "only wanted white babies" and although she preferred to "stay out of everything", there were "those

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Ltr From Civil Administrator Palaus to Commanding Officer, 537th Base Survey Company, 6 December 1948. (RG 313, Box 7148, Folder - Charges).

²¹Ibid.

²²Ltr. From Civil Administrator, Palau District to CA Rep., Yap - Palau District, Undated. (RG 313, Box 6954).

²³Ibid.

Palauan females who were able to get their way into things [and] they were the ones who would get their white babies".²⁴ Employment on Guam was not the only action blamed for producing "white babies". The movie theatre in Koror is often jokingly suggested as the place where relationships that ended with pregnancy began. Being the centre of entertainment it was the main place where navy men could mix with Palauan women. Going to the movies was the most common manner of dating for nurses and American hospital corpsmen and as Alfonso Oiterong saw it "very soon you find babies come out...white baby with a brown mother".²⁵ The movies were free and

there would be a lot of Americans, navys there. Most of the Palauans who went to the theater were the nurses or the ones who worked in the laundry...that's why there were so many babies.²⁶

Although at the time "white babies" were regarded as "first class"²⁷, today the subject causes some embarrassment.²⁸ It is generally kept secret and discussing such relationships is regarded as "gossiping".²⁹ Many people were aware of "intimate" relations between Palauan women and American men in the navy period, but few could recall any marriages in those early days. "It was tabu to marry Americans. We were supposed to fear Americans".³⁰ Wilhelm Rengiil remembers, at that time "most of us looked at them [mixed marriages] and consider it tabu".³¹

The attitude of naval government was similar, though the issue did not arise officially until the late 1940s. At the beginning of 1949 a seaman named Marshall B.

²⁴Benged Sechewas (W 1916).

²⁵Alfonso Oiterong.

²⁶Ascension Ngelmas.

²⁷Man, Ngermid (1919).

²⁸During an interview when another person raised that the interviewee had given birth to a white baby, the woman being interviewed was very embarrassed so I did not pursue the subject further.

²⁹My interpreter, Camella Ngirausui, in explanation of another interviewee's reluctance to discuss this issue said "Back then it was the thing to do, but now people are kind of embarrassed so they keep things to themselves and this is like gossiping".

³⁰Woman, Ngermid.

³¹Wilhelm Rengiil (M 1929).

Decker sent in a request for permission to marry "a native girl of the Palau Islands".³² Commander Hardison sent the letter upwards for approval, but attached his recommendation that the request not be granted. He wrote that : "It is the opinion of the Commanding Officer that these marriages are seldom successful". He also questioned the "morals" of the girl involved, commenting that "an illegitimate child was born to her some two (2) months ago, allegedly fathered by an American who has been detached".³³ The Deputy High Commissioner did grant permission for this particular marriage to proceed but warned that in general "inter-cultural marriages should not be encouraged."³⁴

The next year Commander Curtis received a concerned letter from the mother of an enlisted man, Paul Wade, who had informed her that he wished to marry a Palauan girl. She wrote of her immense worry and requested that the commander let the family know something of the background of the girl concerned and whether he thought "it advisable for him to marry her".³⁵ Curtis replied promptly that

The girl in question is a nurse working here at the Naval Dispensary, and as such is considered to be on a higher level than most other Palauan girls. She is a nice girl by Palau standards, but would hardly fit in well with our society.

Your son Paul is a fine boy, intelligent and well liked by his shipmates. I could not recommend his marriage to this girl unless he decides to live in the Orient the rest of his life where she would fit in. However, as long as he is in the Navy it is hard to say where he will be stationed.

Under the above conditions I do not think the marriage would be advised.³⁶

³²Ltr Decker, Marshall B., TE3, US Navy to Commander Naval Forces Marshalls-Carolines via Commanding Officer, Naval Personnel, 26 January 1949. (RG 313, Box 7148, Folder: 'Charges').

³³First Endorsement on Ltr From Decker M.T. From Commanding Officer, Naval Personnel to Commander Naval Forces, Marshalls Carolines, 26 January 1949. (RG 313, Box 7148, Folder: 'Charges').

³⁴Ltr. From Deputy High Commissioner, Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands to Commander Naval Forces, Marianas (no date but Received Stamp - 4 March 1949). (RG 313, Box 7148, Folder: 'Charges'). In this case the Deputy High Commissioner believed that "the persons concerned have a full understanding of the problems to be faced" so "should therefore be permitted to marry".

³⁵Ltr. Mrs Roy Wade to The Commanding Officer of Civ. Ad. Unit Det., 28 November 1950. (RG 313, Box 7150, Folder: 'Domestic Relations').

³⁶Ltr. From A.D. Curtis, Commander, USNR, Commanding Officer to Mrs Roy Wade, 11 December 1950. (RG 313, Box 7150, Folder: 'Domestic Relations').

One of the very few men who did marry and stay in the Palaus was a Motor Machinist Mate assigned to Angaur. By February 1946 the entire Military Government unit on Angaur was 1 officer and 4 enlisted men ³⁷ During the following month Henry (Hank) A. Worswick and two other men put in for discharge from the navy. Hank recalls his surprise at having his request granted.

I don't know what happened that I got through. I got out on just one of those freak things. Three of us when our time was up - the war was over and they were rotating people back to the States on points and you had to wait...but I was enlisted and if you were enlisted, when your time was up you could get a discharge. All you had to do was waive the transportation [so] that the government was no longer responsible for you. Three of us put in for it and I was the only one that came back o.k. Nobody knows why! I suppose the general in charge back in Hawaii or somewhere woke up this morning - 'Oh Christ, sign the paper'!³⁸

Hank had been having a relationship with a part-Angaurese woman.³⁹ Her father had come from Ulithi to work in the Japanese phosphate mines and had married an Angaurese woman. Hank "fell in love with" her and this was the main reason behind his desire to get a discharge and stay in Palau. He was even more surprised that the request went through, because there "was actually a non-fraternization [rule]" and "they frowned on marriages like mine".⁴⁰ After his discharge, Hank moved out of the small navy camp and into a vacant house. He stayed in Angaur and worked for the Pomeroy Company, which had come to Angaur in 1946 to reactivate the ex-Japanese phosphate mine.⁴¹

Ngkeruker Salii recalls that marriages were few on Angaur in the early navy period because there was only a small number of Americans around.⁴² There were some women there who "had children from the soldiers and they didn't get married".⁴³

³⁷*US Naval Military Government Unit, Palau Islands - Monthly Report for February 1946.*

³⁸Hank Worswick (Born 13 November 1921) : KRW Interview 24 November 1990, Ngerchemai, Koror, Palau.

³⁹Hank did not mention the name of his wife.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*

⁴¹*Ibid.*

⁴²Ngkeruker Salii (W 1902).

⁴³Robert Eldukl (M 1917).

On Peleliu, where there was a large contingent of Americans attached to the Naval Air Base, Palauan women also had intimate relationships with navy men. One woman who was in her late teens remembers that the men were friendly and kind. Although she did not "dare go" herself, a number of her friends dated navy men and

my friends would tell me, those who dated Americans, that they were very nice. They treat women nicely, more than anybody else they could have known. Some had babies.⁴⁴

Temporary intimate relationships between navy men and Palauan women were the norm. This led to problems. A small number of cases of venereal disease were detected as early as May 1946.⁴⁵ During 1948-49 the number of cases of venereal disease rose quite high at different times.⁴⁶ The semi-annual sanitary report for the second half of 1949 noted that

The venereal disease incidence has been moderately high due to certain difficulties in executing adequate control measures. The incidence of gonorrhoea among the native population is fairly high, and there is at least one strain of organism which does not readily respond to the usually adequate treatment schedules.⁴⁷

The main issue raised in a discussion of control measures against VD was the lack of recreational facilities for navy men. On-station activities were considered "inadequate" and improvement was needed in available movies and library books. There also needed to be a "greater scope" of off-station entertainment.⁴⁸ It was stressed that "co-mingling" of naval personnel and Palauans was already being

⁴⁴Woman, Peleliu.

⁴⁵Five enlisted men and seven "native girls...were found to have positive smears" in tests for gonorrhoea. See *US Naval Military Government Unit, Palau Islands - Monthly Report of Medical Department Activities for May 1946 - Enclosure (B) to Monthly Report of Military Government Activities for May 1946*.

⁴⁶52 treatments listed in *Quarterly Report 2-48 January, February March 1948*, pp. 3-4, and 188 treated in *US Civil Administration Unit, Palau District - Quarterly Report 2-49 January, February March 1949*, pp. 20-24. (Held at Hoover Institution).

⁴⁷*US Civil Administration Unit, Palau District - Semiannual sanitary report for the period ending 31 December 1949*.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*

"discouraged" and "undesirable and morally irresponsible native girls" had been removed "to other islands in the vicinity".⁴⁹

A number of statements by enlisted men recommended for discharge by the administration, attest to the boredom suffered by some personnel. Gerald Unzicker, who was to be discharged "by reason of unsuitability", wrote asking for leniency. He explained that Palau was his first assignment after "boot training" and that

To me this was a disappointment, as I had hoped to see some of the "Navy." The island of Palau is small. There is literally nothing to do in the line of entertainment, and due to the Civil Administration program, the fraternization with the native population, particularly females, is prohibited. Such duty has been a far cry from what I was accustomed to in civilian life and, as stated, what I expected in the Navy.⁵⁰

This feeling was shared by Hadley Wickham. He pointed out that the only recreation activities available - fishing and swimming - were "practically impossible to participate in" because of the shortage of transportation. He also complained of the "positive prohibition against associating with the female population", pointing out that

Personally, I feel tha [sic] the restrictions against men associating with women are not in order. Personnel in Japan, for example, can go with and in some cases marry Japanese girls. Why shouldn't the same permission be granted as concerns Palauan women, who, in my opinion, are as desirable, if not more so, for companionship than Japanese women.⁵¹

Joe Francis wrote that outside of working hours, which were between 7 am and 1 pm, "there is nothing to do but sit and talk about what the crew should have and cannot get".⁵² For enlisted man, Gerald Duncan, the "means" of entertainment available prompted him to request a transfer away from Koror.

I do not feel that I am the type of person suited for duty in an area such as Palau. I do not care for fishing or drinking, which to some extent is the only recreation available on Koror. Further I am a

⁴⁹Ibid.

⁵⁰*Statement of Gerald Alan Unzicker, DKS, USN, no date but held with recommendation for discharge dated 23 May 1950.*

⁵¹*Statement of Hadley Dallas Wickham, Jr., CSSA, USN - 23 May 1950. (RG 313, Box 7150, Folder : Separation).*

⁵²*Statement of Francis, Joe C., SK3...USN - 23 May 1950. (RG 313, Box 7150, Folder : Separation).*

extent is the only recreation available on Koror. Further I am a married man. As I am unable to have my family with me, I do not wish to be subjected to the only other means of passing time, i.e., illicit relationships with native women. I feel that any young man who must serve in an area where there is absolutely no recognized legitimate means of diversion will eventually find time for illegitimate diversion.⁵³

Civil Administration was aware of the complaints of its men and of the frequency of "illegitimate diversions" despite their prohibition. Its reaction was to stress that

Recreation on Koror is to a large degree up to the individual and his caliber is generally evidenced by the manner in which he spends his spare time. Movies, fishing, baseball, archery, swimming, shell collecting etc. are available on Koror for any individual who so desires and has enough initiative [sic] to help himself.⁵⁴

In addition the medical department conducted regular VD lectures for the men and provided a "well supplied prophylaxis station in the enlisted men's area".⁵⁵

The sanitary report for 1950 blamed the high incidence of VD on its prevalence among Palauans and the "promiscuity of the native girls".⁵⁶ These problems, it argued, caused difficulties in controlling the disease amongst naval personnel.⁵⁷ Interviews with visiting civilian Americans and with Palauans themselves suggest that this so-called "promiscuity" was as prevalent amongst naval personnel. Pastor Fey remembers that there were "some godless Americans" and occasions, which he prefers to forget, when "American GI's were looking too sharp for girls".⁵⁸ While for most Palauan women there was a concrete reason for their intimate relations - pregnancy and

⁵³Ltr. From DUNCAN, Gerald H to Commander Naval Forces, Marianas via Commanding Officer, Naval Personnel, Civil Administration Unit, Palau, stamped 19 May 1950. (RG 313, Box 7150, Folder : Duty and Detail).

⁵⁴Ltr From Commanding Officer, Naval Personnel to Commander Naval Forces Marianas - being First Endorsement on request of Gerald H. Duncan, 16 May 1950. (RG 313, Box 7150, Folder : Duty and Detail).

⁵⁵US Civil Administration Unit, Palau District - *Semiannual sanitary report for the period ending 31 December 1949*.

⁵⁶It is interesting to note that VD in this period was non-existent among Black naval personnel, probably because white Americans were favoured in this period, especially as fathers for children. See chart labelled "Venereal Disease Incidence and Incidence Rates" in *ibid.* and in following *Semiannual Sanitary Report for the period ending 30 June 1950*. (RG 313, Box 7146, Folder - Semi-Annual Reports).

⁵⁷*Semiannual Sanitary Report for the period ending 30 June 1950*.

⁵⁸Pastor Wilhelm Fey.

bearing a white child; for a large number of the Americans involved it was merely entertainment.

William Vitarelli arrived in Palau in November 1949 to take up a post as civilian educational administrator employed by the navy. Although he was not a particularly "puritanical person", he was struck by the "very sordid" nature of the relationship between "the American military man and the native people". Fraternizing was widespread and it seemed that

every officer and almost every enlisted had a girlfriend. They would even go into the barracks and sleep in there with their boyfriends. There was a lot of that and babies being born. Babies were born and sometimes the officers would leave and never see them again.⁵⁹

On the Palauan side the babies were loved and cared for and "no stigma" was attached to them. Vitarelli recalls that such children were "actually wanted [and] many mothers would take their daughters and [say] "Go and get a baby from that guy".⁶⁰ Yet there was a measure of sordid behaviour amongst the Americans, carried on with no concern for "the Palauan culture way" and "not even with the American decent way".⁶¹ When he was in Koror, venereal disease went through the area "like wildfire", brought in the early days by men from the Philippines. Vitarelli recalls that some of the infected women were sent to Guam to be treated. The Navy had great difficulty convincing the men to be tested at all.⁶² New arrivals were lectured about the dangers as soon as they disembarked,⁶³ and the medical officer "passed out condoms all over the place". Many of these turned up at parties, blown up and used as balloons.⁶⁴

In January 1949 a team led by the General Inspector of the US Pacific Fleet, comprising a group of Trust Territory administrators, passed through Palau. Among

⁵⁹William Vitarelli : KRW Interview 4 August 1990, Maui, Hawaii.

⁶⁰Ibid.

⁶¹Ibid.

⁶²Ibid.

⁶³Comment by Henrietta Vitarelli who was present during cited interview with William Vitarelli.

⁶⁴William Vitarelli.

the group's recommendations was a comment on the type of enlisted personnel that should be employed in the civil administration unit. In the interest of "tangible factors in connection with relationships with the native peoples" and "factors affecting morale", it was considered that men should be at least second class petty officers "screened and indoctrinated". It was even more desirable "that all personnel be married and have dependents with them".⁶⁵ In a euphemistic manner the team were suggesting that if the unit was staffed with married men the problems associated with fraternization could be stamped out.

Vitarelli recalls that navy government was more disturbed by a relationship involving an American woman and Palauan man.⁶⁶ This was a rare occurrence because there were few women other than navy wives in Palau at the time. However in late 1950 Vitarelli, as educational administrator, employed a young woman to teach English and History at the Intermediate school in Koror. She was blonde and attractive and quickly picked up a nickname amongst the navy men - 'the Blonde Bomber'. This woman became involved in a relationship with a Palauan man. Vitarelli "had no qualms" as she was still doing her work effectively. However when a navy officer saw the two kissing, "immediately, after all this fraternizing and all those men with all those girls, [that] didn't mean a damn thing! But [when] they saw the Blonde Bomber with him...out she goes...They shipped her out."⁶⁷

The problems witnessed by Vitarelli and commented on by the inspection team were the outcome of more liberal relations between navy personnel and Island women in the early years of naval government. In the first years of naval administration close relations between Americans and Palauans were not actively discouraged. Rose Kebekol recalls that the first commander, Captain Byrholdt, arranged a party

for young men and women only. So we would all go up to
Topside. There was a place to drink and a theater and he told the

⁶⁵*Report of Inspection of the TTPI by The General Inspector US Pacific Fleet, 4 January - 2 February 1949. (RG 38, Box 1).*

⁶⁶William Vitarelli.

⁶⁷*Ibid.*

high officers not to bother us...so we would go there and dance...just Palauan young women and young navys.⁶⁸

The dance was in a liquor hall and there was beer available but only the men drank. The officers were not allowed to join in, but could stay outside and watch if they wished.⁶⁹

Some Palauan men also became involved in initiating relationships between Palauan women and Americans by helping young seamen to find entertainment. Mengesebuuch Yalap recalls a Palauan man with the navy men and "they used him to get girls for them".⁷⁰ Karmelong Mengur not only supplied Americans with alcohol, but also provided a place for young navy men to take their Palauan girlfriends. There was a "shack" near Topside "with beds inside". The soldiers had nowhere else to go so they would come with their girlfriends to see Karmelong and he would direct them to the building and open it for them.⁷¹ Temel Ngirchorachel worked in the officers' mess hall and often attended parties put on by the navy men. They were mostly parties for dancing and drinking. He recalls that at the time he worked in the mess "the women were still free to go with the soldiers".⁷² On some occasions American officers asked him to act as an interpreter. He accompanied them in their jeep to the laundry, where they went to "check out girls".

In 1947, Yano Kebekol Mariur returned from Guam, where he had gone to learn English, and became a driver for the third naval commander in Koror, Captain Ball.⁷³ Yano established a friendship with the commander : "he was nice. He liked music so when I was with him, they had a group for music and he also liked dancing". Captain

⁶⁸Rose Kebekol (W 1922).

⁶⁹Ibid.

⁷⁰Mengesebuuch Yalap.

⁷¹Karmelong Mengur (M 1918).

⁷²Temel Ngirchorachel (M 1928).

⁷³Commander Ball served from October 1946 to October 1947. See Appendix C.

Ball "dated a Palauan girl" and "had a baby" and Yano explains, "I was the one who picked her out and set it up."⁷⁴

Navy men had frequent parties and dances. A Ngermid woman says she "blames the Americans for all the babies. They were "naughty" and "always wanted fun".⁷⁵ Mereb Eruang was often invited to parties put on by Americans. Everybody was allowed to go, men, women, officers and enlisted men, and alcohol was available there.⁷⁶ The situation was similar on Peleliu. A man who had been away from Palau during the war years serving as a crewman on a Japanese vessel, returned to Peleliu towards the end of 1946. He recalls that while the Americans were there, he often "went to parties and drank". They cranked up an old record player, played dance records and everybody joined in. There was San Miguel beer and lots of food and people just "slept and ate and had fun, provided by the American soldiers." The war had been "hell" for so many people and "it was a pleasure to know we can have fun sometimes".⁷⁷

As people began to return to their villages and rebuild their homes, Rose Adelbai found that navy men would often wander around and "visit each house", bringing chewing gum and chocolate, drinks and other "goodies".⁷⁸ Karmelong Mengur also recalls regular visits by Americans. "They would walk down to the houses and give us liquor and beer to drink and they would be dancing inside the houses".⁷⁹ Sometimes Palauans would invite Americans to their own parties, because they "didn't have much going on" in their camps at Topside.⁸⁰ The unmarried swabbies often ended up at Karmelong's place in order to buy his home-brewed alcohol and many would stay around and get drunk there.

⁷⁴Yano Kebekol Mariur (M 1926).

⁷⁵Woman, Ngermid.

⁷⁶Mereb Eruang (M 1914).

⁷⁷Man, Peleliu (1921) : KRW Interview 22 October 1990, SCC, Koror, Palau.

⁷⁸Rose Adelbai (W 1921).

⁷⁹Karmelong Mengur.

⁸⁰Baiei Babul (M 1921).

While some of the women who became involved with Americans suffered venereal disease as a consequence, a few of the men who spent a lot of time with the swabbies began to drink alcohol regularly. In its mid 1947 report naval government made a connection between these two issues. It stressed that "the demand for intoxicants" and other "luxuries"

encourages pandering and prostitution. The ability of Americans to procure some luxuries also acts as a leverage in procuring the favours of the women. These factors all place stresses and strains in the native society which are difficult to dispell.[sic]⁸¹

Alcohol began to be used in payment for favours and some Palauans were able to gain access to it through their "connections" with Americans.⁸² Drunkenness amongst naval personnel and Palauan men became an increasingly destructive problem. In November 1946, three people were prosecuted for the "possession of intoxicating liquors".⁸³ By the following February the number of alcohol related offences for the month had risen to seven.⁸⁴ Throughout the period 1947-49 the most common crimes reported were drunk and disorderly, or possessing, making or selling intoxicants. A number of the drunkenness cases resulted in some form of violence.⁸⁵

During Commander Ball's term it was noted that "the use of intoxicants by the natives is still a problem".⁸⁶ This comment followed a list of 20 alcohol related cases tried by the Palau High Court in the period July-September 1947.⁸⁷ In the next quarter

⁸¹*Military Government Unit, Palau Islands - Quarterly Report of activities for Quarter Ending 30 June 1947.*

⁸²Man, Ngermid, Mongami Kelmal (M 1926), Jonathon Emul and Alfonso Oiterong all commented on the ways in which people were able to obtain alcohol through "American friends".

⁸³*US Naval Military Government Unit, Palau Islands - Monthly Report of activities for the month of November 1946.* p. 14. (RG 38, Box 39).

⁸⁴*US Naval Military Government Unit, Palau Islands - Monthly Report of Activities for February 1947.* p. 15. (RG 313, Box 6925).

⁸⁵See *Monthly* and *Quarterly Reports* for this period.

⁸⁶*US Civil Administration Unit, Palau Islands - Quarterly Report of Activities for Quarter Ending 30 September 1947.* p. 14.

⁸⁷*Ibid.* p. 13.

the basis of the problem becomes clearer. The behaviour of many young Palauans, it was suggested, was based on their interpretation of being an American.

Some ideas have been assimilated by the younger and middle-aged Palauans on American Government and customs which are erroneous. These Palauans have interpreted our system of government as more of an anarchy than a democracy because of the behavior of personnel from visiting ships and from the Army and Navy stationed here. This is one factor which has made it more difficult for the chiefs to exercise authority over the younger people. Drinking of intoxicants is prevalent among the younger people, and they possess a craving for the alcohol. Misdemeanors are more numerous than ever before due to drinking and the negation of authority.⁸⁸

William Vitarelli recalls an incident involving both visiting Seabees (Naval Construction Battalion) and resident "white hats" (naval enlisted men), which reveals the poor behaviour of some Americans. Vitarelli was asked by Commander Curtis to take charge of planning a welcoming party for the incoming sailors. He got together a committee and planned swimming, games and "a big party for the Seabees to be welcomed by the white hats".⁸⁹ However, drinking became the most popular entertainment and "they got into their cups". Violence erupted when one of the Seabees pushed a white-hat. Within moments there was

a riot of white-hats against Seabees, any Seabee - a white hat would get in and fight him right away and all the girls, their girlfriends...what had happened was the white-hats had cornered the market on the girls and the Seabees were coming in and cutting in on the dancing...and that didn't go...And there was some pretty strong violence. I saw one white hat with a knife and he was really mad.⁹⁰

Vitarelli was even more shocked at the behaviour of the officers, who just "faded away" as soon as the trouble started. The situation was left to be sorted out on its own and the solution seemed to be "might makes right".⁹¹ Vitarelli recalls that there was a number of Palauans at this party, men and women, but mostly women.

⁸⁸*US Civil Administration Unit, Palau Islands - Quarterly Report of Activities for October, November and December 1947.* pp. 18-19.

⁸⁹William Vitarelli.

⁹⁰*Ibid.*

⁹¹*Ibid.*

Not all Palauans witnessed this type of behaviour. The Civil Administration Unit (CivAd) was aware in 1948 that "acculturation has not progressed equally throughout the Palaus" and that the "impact of foreign cultures" was strongest on Koror, Angaur, Peleliu and Airai.⁹² However, it was felt that those Palauans who were in contact with Americans on a regular basis were "quick to imitate American ideas and patterns", good and bad.⁹³ The result of this was that most problems among Palauans stemmed from people learning from bad American behaviour. The two "greatest deterrents to law and order" being emulated in early 1948 were "intoxication and gaming".⁹⁴ Chaplain Power, who visited Koror in November 1948, reported to the Area Chaplain that "Alcoholic beverages run too freely among men and officers".⁹⁵ As Palauans saw Americans using alcohol regularly, naturally some wanted the "privilege" of drinking themselves.⁹⁶

Drinking of alcohol was discouraged amongst Palauans, but laws against its use were determined individually by the Koror CivAd unit rather than on a Trust Territory wide basis. In 1948 CivAd Palau noted that the Trust Territory Agreement mentioned only "control" of alcohol and that there were no uniform laws across Micronesia. This had resulted in Palauans asking "why can the Saipanese have it and not us?" and conditions in Palau were becoming "identical with that of the United States during prohibition" with bootleggers running rife.⁹⁷ Palauans who wanted and could not get alcohol legally frequented the illegal manufacturers as did naval enlisted personnel, looking for something stronger than beer. There was some concern that the manufacturers were "dispensing inferior products" and exacting "exorbitant prices for

⁹²US Civil Administration Unit, Palau District - *Quarterly Report 2-48, January, February, March 1948*. p. 21.

⁹³Ibid. p. 21.

⁹⁴Ibid. p. 22.

⁹⁵"Trip to Civil Administration Unit, Palau Island, Report on" - *Report from Chaplain B.S. Power to Area Chaplain*, 20 November 1948. (RG 313, Box 6926).

⁹⁶US Civil Administration Unit, Palau District - *Quarterly Report 2-48, January, February, March 1948*. p. 22.

⁹⁷US Civil Administration Unit, Palau District - *Quarterly Report 3-38, for months of April, May and June 1948*. p. 11.

this inferior liquor" and there needed to be some control over this.⁹⁸ In mid 1949 Commander Curtis reported on the "more or less promiscuous but behind the scenes sale of 'saki' in Koror restaurants"⁹⁹ and at a Civil Administration Conference in Guam later that year he stressed the importance of implementing "uniform liquor laws" across the Trust Territory.¹⁰⁰ He cited an example of trouble caused by the lack of these laws. A group of Guamanians had arrived in Koror with 30 cases of whiskey which they were going to sell to Palauans. Luckily they were caught before they started selling, but Curtis questioned the paucity of supervision on Navy vessels leaving Guam, allowing passengers to carry so much alcohol among their personal luggage.¹⁰¹

As early as 1947 there had been some concern in Koror that the abuse of alcohol would result in a deterioration of conditions "to the extent that law and order will be difficult to maintain in these islands".¹⁰² Although this did not occur, three years later there were enough problems caused within Palauan families by alcohol for "the mothers of Palau" to present Commander Curtis with a petition entitled "The Evil of Drink".¹⁰³ The petition decried how different things had become in Palau, "much different from the old days". It complained of the lack of control over alcohol and the poor punishment for drinking offences.

When the Japanese were here there was drinking, but there was a punishment for it, so the drinkers were afraid, and there was not much drinking and no deaths. But now drinking is permitted, so many people drink and want sharp weapons to fight and kill. In the

⁹⁸"Sale of Beer in the Palau District; Recommendations on" - Ltr from Civil Administrator, Palau District to Deputy High Commissioner, Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands, 29 October 1948. (RG 313, Box 6928).

⁹⁹"Sale of Alcoholic Beverages - Control of," - Ltr from Civil Administrator, Palau to Deputy High Commissioner, Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands, 6 July 1949. (RG 313, Box 6928).

¹⁰⁰Report on Civil Administration Conference at Guam - 13 to 16 September 1949. (RG 313, Box 6928).

¹⁰¹Ibid. p.4.

¹⁰²US Civil Administration Unit, Palau Islands - Quarterly Report of Activities for October, November and December 1947. p. 19.

¹⁰³"Petition (The Evil of Drink); forwarding of" - Memorandum from Civil Administrator, Palau District to LCDR Dorothy Richard (W) USN, 19 June 1950. (RG 313, Box 6930).

past four years, 6 people were murdered because of drink, and those who drink bad whiskey are not a few.¹⁰⁴

The "Evil of Drink" went on to say that mothers were beginning to feel it was "better that all our babies be girls, or that all our boy babies die, unless this situation be changed". The women had already appealed to their menfolk to no avail so were now seeking the "powerful assistance" of the civil administrator. The drain on the family income, the disruption of life and the violence caused by "fathers and husbands and brothers and sons" who were heavy drinkers was most feared.

The drinkers enter houses to seize women, they shout out in the middle of the night, curse and throw stones at the houses. There is no more peace in our island between parent and child, between families, between husband and wife, now that drinking is allowed.¹⁰⁵

Tutii Ngirutoi, a policeman during navy times, recalls that most crimes during the navy period were the result of drunkenness. The "main problem" was that the Americans did not really make it clear to Palauans "whether to drink or not to drink, whether it was bad to drink or good to drink".¹⁰⁶ As there was no information, most people drank and that caused the majority of trouble. Tutii did not drink himself, but was aware of where a lot of the alcohol was coming from. Men who lived in Ngermid had the best access to beer - "they would get it from the soldiers, the navys".¹⁰⁷ Disorderly behaviour, such as vandalising houses¹⁰⁸ and throwing stones, was a common reason for arrest. Mongami Kelmal, another policeman, remembers walking around keeping watch for "drunk people" and people throwing stones at Palauan houses.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁴Ibid. The fairly good use of English in this petition suggests that a Palauan educated in English or an American assisted in writing it.

¹⁰⁵Ibid.

¹⁰⁶Tutii Ngirutoi.

¹⁰⁷Ibid.

¹⁰⁸*Civil Administration Charge Sheet*, Angaur 9 March 1949. (RG 313, Box 7148).

¹⁰⁹Mongami Kelmal.

A collection of 1949 charge sheets reveals alcohol abuse as a major factor in the growth of crime. Of nine cases before the courts from February to August 1949, four were alcohol related and two other offenders had been previously charged for drunkenness. The alcohol related cases involved violence, including assault, or general disruptive behaviour.¹¹⁰

Change and acculturation, especially as it was not balanced across Palau and over all age groups, became a cause of friction between people and a source of confusion for many individuals. At the beginning of 1949 the Civil Administration Quarterly Report noted that

one of the changes stemming from American rule seems to be an emancipation of the young people. The elders complain that the young people will not mind them, and that, as a consequence, drinking, thieving and general lawbreaking is on the increase.¹¹¹

American ways, bad and good, created tension between the old and the young, between those who made connections and became a part of the new order and those who preferred to stay out of things and maintain Japanese-Palauan ways. This tension often resulted in trouble. The same report commented that the American "free enterprise system" was encouraging Palauans to become individualistic and this meant that the "old custom of neighbour help neighbour" was gradually disappearing.¹¹² Ascension Ngelmas believes that the American way, where "it is one person, his own will, his own time, his own way, that makes lots of trouble".¹¹³ In Japanese times there would be an order to do things and everybody would do what they were told - "they would work as one to do one thing". People were too scared to disobey and "only crazy people would do something wrong".¹¹⁴ Dengelei Saburo agrees that in Japanese times there would be "the word for everybody to work and if one person did

¹¹⁰*Civil Administration Charge Sheets 1949* dated 14 February, 9 March, 6 April, 5 July, 19 July, 23 July, 12 August, 18 August, 18 August. (RG 313, Box 7148).

¹¹¹*US Civil Administration Unit, Palau District - Quarterly Report 1-49 for October, November and December 1948*. p. 20. (Held at Hoover Institution).

¹¹²*Ibid.*

¹¹³Ascension Ngelmas.

¹¹⁴*Ibid.*

not volunteer or invite himself to work, he would either get thrown into jail or beaten". Under the Americans, things were turned around. The young people had their own "free will" and when asked to help clean up the village or build a new dock the young men would question, "Are we paid to do that? Because it is not our own will to do it."¹¹⁵

Such change was gradual and as the CivAd reported in late 1948,

Acculturation is very hard to measure. A person residing in the Palau does not see changes, they take place too slowly. It is only when a person who has left here returns and calls attention to certain things, that changes are noticed. Then the more or less permanent resident remembers back and concedes that it is indeed something that has changed.¹¹⁶

John Useem was such a person. In 1948 he returned once more to Palau as a scientist with the CIMA project - the Co-ordinated Investigation of Micronesian Anthropology.¹¹⁷ Although his work for this study was purely anthropological, focussing on traditional Palauan social structure rather than present day issues, he was still a witness to the changes taking place.¹¹⁸

In his April 1948 interim report to the Deputy High Commissioner, Useem wrote that social change was continuing in Palau and that it would "be some time before Palau reaches an equilibrium between the old order and the new".¹¹⁹ During this transitional period he stressed that "the natives are most anxious for the Americans to govern and guide them".¹²⁰ The young people particularly were experiencing "the dilemmas

¹¹⁵Dengelei Saburo (W 1930).

¹¹⁶*US Civil Administration Unit, Palau - Quarterly Report No 3-48 for months of April, May and June 1948.* p. 20.

¹¹⁷CIMA was a co-ordinated research project running from 1947-1949 and involving 42 anthropologists, linguists, geographers and scientists from 21 universities and museums in the USA. These researchers investigated many different aspects of Micronesian science and anthropology. The project was organized by the Pacific Science Board of the National Academy of Sciences, with financial assistance from the Office of Naval Research. See Leonard Mason, "Applied Anthropology in the TTPI" in Karen Knudsen (ed.), *History of the US Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands* (Proceedings of The Ninth Annual Pacific Islands Studies Conference, University of Hawaii, Honolulu, 1985) p. 35.

¹¹⁸John Useem.

¹¹⁹Distribution from Deputy High Commissioner, Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands - *Interim Report of CIMA scientist (John Useem on Palau dated 28 April 1948)* - Forwarding of, dated 28 May 1948. p. 3. (RG 313, Box 6926).

¹²⁰*Ibid.*

characteristic of that age grade in a changing culture".¹²¹ Useem saw that the young people were "finding they had a lot of freedom with Americans" and were enjoying it.¹²² Many were "enthusiastically independent" and were looking for an escape from "old traditions" and "forced obligations".¹²³

During his 1948 stay Useem spent most of his time in Melekeok, which was not as acculturated as Koror because the people there had less contact with Americans. He became aware that people living and working in the "growing edges" of Palau - Koror, Angaur and Peleliu - were the most unclear about what their future would be. Those in the outer areas were "wearing American clothes", but were living in almost the same way as they had under Japanese administration. In Koror there was more opportunity to see an alternative lifestyle, through reading *Life* and *Time* magazines, learning about the way in which Americans lived, seeing Americans living at Topside.

In Koror they could see movies, there were books around, paperback books and they were reading anything they could get their hands on and as far as they could, associating with young Americans and talking back and forth...They would look at the movie pictures, actresses and how they dressed. They would see pictures of American cowboys and how they acted...It was open culturally. There were no constraints imposed by either side so there were different segments that really loved it...I remember groups in Koror who started drinking whiskey instead of sake and were very proud of getting drunk on whiskey instead of sake, talking about American football and baseball...so it was a period of acculturation.¹²⁴

The administration too, noted that people in Koror in this period were beginning to pick up American ways, in expressions and in appearance.

Some slang expressions have gained circulation among the younger set of English-speaking people, most of the mechanics at the garage manage to swear (in American) if a wrench slips and they bark their knuckles. The younger people are buying many of their clothes from Montgomery, Ward and Sears and are beginning to look like a high school boy in the states. (This only applies to those who are able to afford it) Some ten to eleven months ago vari-colored sports

¹²¹Ibid. p. 2

¹²²John Useem.

¹²³Ibid.

¹²⁴Ibid.

shirts worn by the Americans were laughed at by the Palauans as being "women's shirts", now there are quite a few shirts like this being worn by the younger people.¹²⁵

People saw things that they wanted from the American way of life. Many picked up superficial material goods and habits, but some of the young people also wanted the freedom and opportunity to live modern lives but "they weren't sure what those lives would be".¹²⁶ In 1948 most people had realized that if they "wanted to be in the modern structure [they] had to figure out how to get to Koror".¹²⁷ That was where opportunity lay. By 1948, approximately 1,100 Palauans were living in Koror "mainly in quonset huts, frame houses with corrugated roofs and sides, and in old Japanese dwellings". A few still lived in temporary tents.¹²⁸

Moving to Koror and forming a personal association with an American was one way in which Palauans made connections with the new order. There were also possibilities for setting up a new business or getting a job working for the administration, the USCC (later replaced by the Island Trading Company¹²⁹) or even for visiting civilian scientists. The instruction programmes for teachers and police had developed further and a new one was set up to train health workers. Useem's interim report for September 1948 observed that in general "the morale among the native population is high and the Palau people feel that they have made very real progress towards recovery".¹³⁰

Peter Hill, another civilian visitor to Palau, arrived in October 1948 as a representative of the Pacific War Memorial Incorporated, which aimed to set up a

¹²⁵US Civil Administration Unit, *Palau - Quarterly Report No 3-48 for months of April, May and June 1948*. p. 20.

¹²⁶Ibid.

¹²⁷Ibid.

¹²⁸School of Naval Administration, *Handbook on the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands...*, p. 180.

¹²⁹With the change-over to civil administration in mid 1947, the United States Commercial Company was relieved of its work in Micronesia by the Island Trading Company which was established by the High Commissioner of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands. The ITC commenced activities on 1 January 1948. See School of Naval Administration, p. 130.

¹³⁰Distribution from Deputy High Commissioner, Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands - *Interim Report of CIMA scientist (Dr. John Useem, dated 9 September 1948)* - Forwarding of, dated 30 October 1948. (RG 313, Box 6926).

scientific field station in Palau.¹³¹ His first impression of Koror was a mix of activity and stagnation. The town itself was "dusty and kind of rickety...[an] old US western cowboy deadwood city". Yet on the northern side, at T-dock from where the Island Trading Company operated

that was where a lot of the boats from Babeldaob came in...you had this feeling of people coming and going and "kerchunk kerchunk", these old Japanese diesel engines...and these wonderful old boats...bringing people and their produce in and out - there was this feeling of ebb and flow of people at the time. And you went up to Topside, that was where the Navy people were, that was where the privileged were.¹³²

The ebb and flow into Koror resulted both from economic ventures and from people coming to the town to train and find work. In each district there were community-owned stores, run by Palauans, which sold trade goods bought from the USCC, but these were not individual money-making ventures.¹³³ As early as 1946 some entrepreneurial Palauans began to set up small businesses for themselves, mainly in Koror. These came and went in a wide variety. Three men who learned something of shoe-making under the Japanese started a small cobbler shop using what equipment they could salvage around Babeldaob.¹³⁴ In August they were selling hand-made wooden clogs for 25 cents a pair.¹³⁵ Others applied for permits to establish such businesses as a barber shop, a restaurant, a laundry, a bakery and a fishing enterprise.¹³⁶ By the end of 1947 these had expanded to include a soft drink stand, ice

¹³¹Ltr from Peter Hill to KRW dated 29 November 1989. "The PWM was an effort to memorialize the war dead thru scientific research, with stations at or near sites of heavy battle".

¹³²Peter Hill : KRW Interview 10 July 1990, Glouster, Ohio.

¹³³*US Military Government Unit, Palau Islands - Monthly Report of Military Government Activities for July 1946.* p. 5.

¹³⁴*Ibid.*

¹³⁵*US Military Government Unit, Palau Islands - Monthly Report of Military Government Activities for August 1946.* p. 4.

¹³⁶*US Military Government Unit, Palau Islands - Monthly Report of Military Government Activities for September 1946.* p. 4.

cream manufacturer, taxi and ferry services, seamstresses and a florist, while restaurants and bakeries continued to be popular choices for new enterprises.¹³⁷

Business reports and financial statements were supposed to be forwarded to CivAd, but this was rare. Many businesses had brief life spans; some shut down periodically; others did not provide reports because

of the persons in the Palaus only a scant handful have any idea of how to prepare a financial statement or even keep the most rudimentary set of books. Businesses are run on a day to day existence and at the end of the month, (or year), if the individual has managed to eat and keep himself clothed after a fashion, it has been a good year.¹³⁸

Peter Hill remembers "a bunch of little stores, teeny little places with a few groceries" mostly only used by Palauans and perhaps by a few enlisted men.¹³⁹ John Useem too speaks of "little restaurants all over, little teeny ones run by new entrepreneurs who had access to American commerce".¹⁴⁰ Some were "half grocery stores, half eating", with a few seats, a table and groceries out the back. Americans used them rarely, "unless they were sightseeing", as they could get things at a much cheaper rate.¹⁴¹ Setting up one of these tiny places was one way in which Palauans tried to make it in the new American system. Often owners had attended trade school, tried and failed to get a government job, then decided to make their way through business instead. Some thought it was safer. In a government job there was always the risk, with the regular change-overs in American administrative personnel, that the incoming staff might hire new employees.¹⁴²

¹³⁷*US Civil Administration Unit, Palau Islands - Quarterly Report of Activities for Quarter Ending 30 September 1947.* p. 15-16 and *US Civil Administration Unit, Palau Islands - Quarterly Report of Activities for months of October, November and December 1947.* p. 15.

¹³⁸*US Civil Administration Unit, Palau Islands - Quarterly Report 2-48 for months of January, February and March 1948.* p. 13.

¹³⁹Peter Hill.

¹⁴⁰John Useem.

¹⁴¹*Ibid.*

¹⁴²*Ibid.*

When asked about the existence of indigenous businesses during navy times most Islanders do not recall any at all.¹⁴³ This is probably because they were invariably very small in size, kept no records and made only minimal profits. It may also be that when they think of a "business", "store" or "restaurant" their concept is of the modern establishments that are present in Koror today, none of which were established in navy times. Jonathon Emul remembers "some little businesses" opening up nearer to 1951, such as

a small bakery making Japanese bread...some small scale businesses like selling local booze, made out of sugar and those left over C rations from the navy.¹⁴⁴

When Minoru Ueki returned to Palau in 1947 Koror was still mostly "empty". He recalls there was only one Navy PX store to which only navy personnel and Palauans who worked for the administration could go. As time passed though

some entrepreneurs, Palauan entrepreneurs began to have a small place where they sell cookies, shaved ice, noodles, you know, shops began ...Four of the big business people today really were the first ones, pioneers in the business and they started from things like that...so some people began to make a lot of money.¹⁴⁵

Felix Yaoch saw that many of the "initial ventures were not very successful". He feels that Palauans were "not used to selling, we're used to sharing". On many occasions relatives of the business owner would come in and ask to put things on credit, but would never be able to pay for them. The store, unable to collect accruing debts, would eventually be forced out of business.¹⁴⁶

If people wanted to make their way in the new system, but did not wish to attempt to set up a business for fear of failure or lack of knowledge, navy government itself provided some avenues for advancement. As the personnel situation began to improve in 1947, the administration set up additional training programmes to create a

¹⁴³KRW Interviews with Palauans, Oct-Nov 1990.

¹⁴⁴Jonathon Emul.

¹⁴⁵Dr. Minoru Ueki (M 1930).

¹⁴⁶Father Felix Yaoch (M 1932).

group of skilled labourers, as well as to augment the number of teachers, and to spread the use of English through Palau. Some of these programmes even took young Palauans away from their home islands, to Guam, for further education.

In January 1947 an "on-the-job" training course was begun in Guam and 37 people were chosen from throughout the Palau area to attend.¹⁴⁷ This seems to have been a joint arrangement between the US Naval Military Government and the United States Commercial Company.¹⁴⁸ Trainees worked at Camp Lalo naval base on Guam.¹⁴⁹ or for naval government on that island.¹⁵⁰ Mongami Kelmal had returned to his home in Kayangel after the war and he recalls that in late 1946 the Americans visited the island and asked who would like to go to Guam.¹⁵¹ There the men who had volunteered "helped the soldiers, transferring things, cleaning the yard". They also studied English, "but didn't really learn".¹⁵² Mongami returned to Koror later in 1947 and attended a teacher training course in order to go back to Kayangel as a teacher.

The navy's "on-the-job" training scheme also included apprenticeships in Koror, in mechanical skills for electricians, carpenters and engine mechanics and a programme for instructing native seamen.¹⁵³ In February 1947 five men were in training aboard vessels with another five selected to begin. Temel Ngirchorachel left his job in the mess hall to become a seaman in 1948. He had heard that Americans "were looking for people to become seamen" so he applied.¹⁵⁴ His work included harbour construction

¹⁴⁷US Military Government Unit, *Palau Islands - Monthly Report of Activities for January 1947*. p. 12.

¹⁴⁸US Military Government Unit, *Palau Islands - Monthly Report of Activities for February 1947*. p.12.

¹⁴⁹"By late 1945, Guam was a veritable armed camp. A massive naval operation base occupied the entire Apra Harbor area...And scattered throughout the island were vast naval and military supply installations. More than 160 military installations, both large and small, were strewn through the...island." Tony Palomo, p. 248.

¹⁵⁰US Military Government Unit, *Palau Islands - Monthly Report of Activities for March 1947*. p.8. (RG 313, Box 7787).

¹⁵¹Mongami Kelmal.

¹⁵²*Ibid.*

¹⁵³US Military Government Unit, *Palau Islands - Monthly Report of Activities for February 1947*. p. 12.

¹⁵⁴Temel Ngirchorachel.

as well as training on board ship, travelling to Guam, Saipan and the small islands south-west of Palau. The Americans told the five men on board, "You are seamen now, you will have to go to all kinds of places". This was exactly what Temel wanted to do at the time.¹⁵⁵

The administration noted the value of apprenticeships in these practical areas:

The labor cost is less by using natives instead of enlisted men. The natives wish this training and demonstrate a willingness to learn. Ship's Captain recommends highly the performance of native seamen. Many of the ratings on this station can be relieved by natives as of now. Only such skills as require much office work and knowledge of English cannot be relieved by natives.¹⁵⁶

Both Peter Hill and William Vitarelli recall that the general attitude of some navy people towards Palauan abilities was more patronising than this report might suggest.¹⁵⁷ Vitarelli saw that Commander Curtis had a particularly condescending attitude towards Palauans. He would "have a certain respect" for their mechanical skills, when "down at the motor pool, a Palauan with a file and a piece of wire was able often to do what his own mechanics couldn't", but had little regard for their ability in other areas.¹⁵⁸ Hill remembers listening to conversations between officers in the mess in which they laughed over "tales of what Palauans were doing"¹⁵⁹, the way the police were acting or how the natives "were not doing things right".¹⁶⁰

In 1948, in a discussion of a possible programme of on-the-job training for Palauans in construction, Commander Hardison revealed that he did not believe Palauans were unskilled, but that they lacked motivation.

At the present time there are several artisans of ability amongst the Palauans, but they have been suppressed so long that they have lost all initiative and force. We have men who are excellent carpenters,

¹⁵⁵Ibid.

¹⁵⁶*US Military Government Unit, Palau Islands - Monthly Report of Activities for February 1947*, p. 12.

¹⁵⁷Peter Hill and William Vitarelli.

¹⁵⁸William Vitarelli.

¹⁵⁹Ltr from Peter Hill, 29 November 1989.

¹⁶⁰Peter Hill Interview.

cement constructors, and others, who worked with the Japs for years, but they require constant supervision. For example, we have men laying a concrete foundation for a quonset. If they require one additional board to complete the form they will sit there until someone comes and tells them where, when, and how to get it. The Japs always had someone there to do it. Therefore, I believe...it would be necessary to have an American Supervisor on the job constantly until they can be educated out of their old lethargy.¹⁶¹

The focus of training and employment for Palauans, and the widespread belief in their inability to act on their own, or in any supervisory role, is clearly revealed in surviving tables of employees' classifications and pay rates, enclosed with reports each month or quarter. The tables show that the majority of Palauans on the American payroll were working in blue rather than white collar jobs. In early 1948, for example, out of a total of 347 employees, 249 held positions as common labourers or semi-skilled/skilled manual labourers, while only 62 were employed in supervisory, clerical, sub-professional and professional roles.¹⁶² Thirty-six others were still undergoing training in education or medicine.¹⁶³

Despite the attitude among some navy people that Palauans were good at supervised mechanical tasks but not much else, numerous Palauans attended training programmes for teachers, health aids and police. People who gained the opportunity to get this kind of professional vocational training were also able to secure a more privileged position in "American Palau". Developing a more permanent connection with the new order aided social mobility and secured a better economic future than did personal and social relationships with navy men, who were only temporary residents. As time progressed, training in English and an understanding of American administrative methods also led to positions of power within the government system of Palau.

¹⁶¹Western Carolines Sub Area - *Memorandum to Admiral C. H. Wright, USN, Deputy High Commissioner, Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands - Report of Employment of Palauans Natives for on the Job Training by NOy Contractors in Construction*, 9 February 1948. (RG 313, Box 6928).

¹⁶²US Civil Administration Unit, Palau District - *Quarterly Report 2-48 for January, February and March 1948*. Exhibit I to Enclosure (A) pp. 5-6.

¹⁶³Ibid.

In January 1947 the official "Teacher Training School, Palau Islands" was established, taking over from the Koror school where Wilhelm Rengiil had been trained.¹⁶⁴ At its inception, eleven student teachers and nine regular teachers were in attendance.¹⁶⁵ Teachers were in demand as there were now thirteen schools in Palau with a total of 1309 students, aged between six and sixteen.¹⁶⁶ It is interesting to note that the majority of older students were male. Above the age of fourteen, the number of males in attendance increased from 63 to 98 while the number of females dropped from 62 to 18.¹⁶⁷ This suggests that men had more opportunity, or were perhaps more encouraged to become educated and to make their way in the American system, to earn money and prestige for their families. The more common role for a woman in her later teens was to have a relationship and children, with an American or with a Palauan. Still there were some women who gained further education, most in the field of nursing, others as teachers.

The need for teachers of English throughout Micronesia led to the establishment of the central Pacific Islands Teacher Training School (PITTS) in Guam. The first group of trainees from Palau left in March 1947.¹⁶⁸ Jonathon Emul was initially trained as a policeman but that year joined six others to study English and teaching at PITTS. He was chosen because he had been a "top student" in Japanese school and had been working as a "teaboy" or office apprentice under Japanese administration. Jonathon recalls that the course in Guam

was the hardest kind of education I have ever done, because I didn't even speak any English language, not even hello. They teach us to write and read and speak at the same time, regardless of how hard you study they just rush us through, because we were the first group of young Micronesians to go to school, to be able to translate

¹⁶⁴*US Military Government Unit, Palau Islands - Monthly Report of Activities for February 1947.* p. 13.

¹⁶⁵*Ibid.*

¹⁶⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁶⁷*Ibid.*

¹⁶⁸*US Military Government Unit, Palau Islands - Monthly Report of Activities for March 1947.* p. 10.

between the two groups of people - Palauans and the American administration.¹⁶⁹

When he returned to Koror in 1948 Jonathon was still "confused" in his feelings about Americans.

I had to choose which system is good and I didn't know anything about democracy. With Japanese, you know, you just shut up and listen. To me - at that time when you had to make your own decision and people are listening to you...I was somehow a bit confused because I got kind of used to somebody making the decision and you are just following it...but I began to like the American system.¹⁷⁰

Jonathon taught at the main school in Koror, where students who had completed elementary school in all districts came to attend the higher grades. As one of the first Palauans thoroughly trained in English, Jonathon worked constantly with Americans.

We were the first students that the Americans can communicate through to the rest of the people in the community. So we were sort of placed in between the society, [between] the Palauan community and the Americans.¹⁷¹

The work was demanding and enjoyable but not well paid. Teachers had been on the administration payroll in the first instance but in August 1947 CivAd stopped paying them and handed the responsibility over to the individual districts. This meant that the number of teachers dropped drastically as districts could only support a few employees on minimal incomes. Some trained teachers went to find other, better paid work.¹⁷² This change affected the growth of education for a time and the teacher training school in Koror closed down as most Palauans in attendance left "to get back to their districts to see if they would become the district supported teachers" or if they would have to find alternative work.¹⁷³ The school was reactivated at the end of the year when Mrs. Taggart and Mrs. Harper, wives of the USCC representatives in Palau,

¹⁶⁹Jonathon Emul.

¹⁷⁰Ibid.

¹⁷¹Ibid.

¹⁷²*US Civil Administration Unit, Palau Islands - Quarterly Report of Activities for Quarter Ending 30 September 1947.* p. 18.

¹⁷³Ibid.

took over the running of the enterprise on a voluntary basis.¹⁷⁴ Students were paid \$10 per month while they attended a four month course, the main focus of which was the study of English, including correct pronunciation and practical usage.¹⁷⁵

Ascension Ngelmas attended this teacher training school at the same time as she was teaching in Airai.

During the summer session we would come to Koror and be in training and when the school started we would take books and go back to Airai. And each year the Academy here would decide who would go on to further training.¹⁷⁶

In mid 1948 the administration commented on the "superior" group of teachers attending the summer school in Koror. The work-load was heavy as the students were "striving to accomplish almost double the amount of work prescribed for the first course".¹⁷⁷ Daily tuition totalled 30 hours per week with extra lessons for three hours every evening. This additional training was "at the request of the trainees who feel confident that they can complete their written assignments in their "spare" time".¹⁷⁸ Ascension lived in a dormitory when she came to the summer school and in her "spare" time also worked as a maid for one of the wives of a navy officer and as a babysitter.¹⁷⁹

In 1950 Ascension Ngelmas, "elementary school teacher from the Airai district", became the first woman to attend the vacation session of PITTS, which had moved from Guam to Truk. She was accompanied by six others including Wilhelm Rengiil and Alfonso Oiterong.¹⁸⁰ Ascension recalls travelling by "small ship" to Guam and

¹⁷⁴US Civil Administration Unit, Palau Islands - *Quarterly Report of Activities for October, November and December 1947*. p. 17.

¹⁷⁵Ibid.

¹⁷⁶Ascension Ngelmas.

¹⁷⁷US Civil Administration Unit, Palau - *Quarterly Report No 3-48 for months of April, May and June 1948*. p. 17.

¹⁷⁸Ibid. p. 18.

¹⁷⁹Ascension Ngelmas. Dependents had been allowed to join their husbands/fathers in 1947.

¹⁸⁰"Teachers Leave for PITTS" in *Forwarding of News Material from Civil Administrator, Palau District to Commander in Chief, US Pacific Fleet (Public Information Officer)* 12 June 1950. (RG 313, Box 7146).

then on a larger vessel to Truk.¹⁸¹ During the six week course 75 students from all over the Trust Territory studied such subjects as "English, mathematics, island history, industrial arts and agriculture".¹⁸²

Alfonso Oiterong recalls that in "summer times we would go to Truk and study". In Truk and in Guam he was able to witness "a different life and...could see a lot of different people". He saw everyone living together

and I felt that was a life and how to achieve harmony. We were so impressed by the way the community was run, by Americans, so that it was something that we learned and felt that it was the kind of good things we could bring to Palau.¹⁸³

On his return, he was often called on to act as an interpreter. Looking back now he says "I really cannot say whether I did a good job in translating", as his command of the language was still limited.¹⁸⁴ Alfonso's involvement in teacher training led him into an even closer association with Americans. He became Superintendent of Schools and was more involved in the development of education, working on the school curriculum with American educationalists and regularly visiting schools all over Palau.¹⁸⁵

Wilhelm Rengiil feels that after his training in Koror, Guam and Truk he was beginning to see "a big difference between [the American] democratic system and Japanese coercive, aristocratic, completely different system of government".¹⁸⁶ However many people were used to the "military type" ways of the Japanese system. It was the young people

they were beginning to see the difference and most of us were attracted to the new democratic system where there is no difference between you...during the Japanese [period] there was a big

¹⁸¹Ascension Ngelmas.

¹⁸²"Teachers Leave for PITTS"...

¹⁸³Ibid.

¹⁸⁴Alfonso Oiterong.

¹⁸⁵Ibid.

¹⁸⁶Wilhelm Rengiil.

segregation between the Islanders and the Japanese and we were not allowed to mingle even in school.¹⁸⁷

In Japanese times people were not allowed to question, but had to say yes all the time. Under the Americans Wilhelm found that "you have a right to question and sometimes you don't have to say yes and that's a big difference."¹⁸⁸ Teacher training opened Wilhelm's eyes to this distinction and gave him the opportunity to study abroad. After training at PITTS in Guam he returned to Koror to teach in the Intermediate School. This was later followed by further education in the Philippines, Japan and Hawaii on a United Nations Fellowship.¹⁸⁹

For Jonathon Emul too, becoming a teacher during navy times opened up opportunity for the future.

If I was still under the Japanese and the Japanese continued to rule the island, I can never become somebody, you know, like a Congressman or an official, unless the Japanese could have changed their way of handling the island or the system of government. There was no chance for Palauans to move up the ladder...[Under Americans] I was a principal and I became Assistant Superintendent of Education and then I became a Congressman....so what changed was we have more chance and opportunity under the American system.¹⁹⁰

In 1948 the administration began to "screen" students in all district schools to assess their educational future. Whereas in the past headmasters selected the best students to attend Intermediate school in Koror, now all children were considered in terms of their ability, their future desires and their "general interest in the betterment of Palau."¹⁹¹ Education was therefore the avenue for many young people who wished to become more involved in the modern development of Palau.

That same year graduation exercises were held in thirteen Palauan schools and CivAd reported that

¹⁸⁷Ibid.

¹⁸⁸Ibid.

¹⁸⁹Ibid.

¹⁹⁰Jonathon Emul.

¹⁹¹*US Civil Administration Unit, Palau - Quarterly Report 4-48 for July, August and September 1948.* p. 18. (Held at Hoover Institution).

the contrast between the exercises this year and the first graduations under American supervision which were held in June 1946 was most gratifying. From the barest and flimsiest of shelters, most schools have been built into substantial structures equipped with home-made essential furniture. Each school has at least one teacher who has completed one term at the Koror Teacher Training School. This teacher instructs the others in American teaching methods and conversational English as extra-curricular duty...All work was suspended in each municipality so that the parents might attend what the Palauans consider to be the one large festivity of the entire year.¹⁹²

Speeches were made in each district and one headmaster who had been a teaching assistant under the Japanese

urged that the Palauans now had Americans ahead of them carrying the lamps to light their way toward a better school system which would prepare the students to carry on later with a minimum of help.¹⁹³

CivAd was most encouraged by the "enthusiastic interest" of Palauans in further education, the development of schools and in the American manner of training.¹⁹⁴ For many young Palauans this interest was not surprising. Education offered the best chance for advancement within modern Palau and for travel abroad.

The October 1949 quarterly report reveals that emigration from Palau in this period was almost entirely a result of students going to PITTS in Truk or on to further nurse or medical practitioner training in Guam.¹⁹⁵ The training programme for nurses and health aides offered more opportunity for Palauan women who wished to make their way into the new economy and way of life. The programme had been initiated in August 1946 when fourteen women started training as nurses.¹⁹⁶ Originally the system aimed only to provide nurses to run dispensaries in each district. Suitable candidates left their villages to attend a course in Koror and then returned to set up a

¹⁹²US Civil Administration Unit, Palau - *Quarterly Report 3-48 for April, May and June 1948*, p. 18.

¹⁹³Ibid. p. 19.

¹⁹⁴Ibid.

¹⁹⁵US Civil Administration Unit, Palau - *Quarterly Report 4-49 for July, August and September 1949*, p. 7. (Held at Hoover Institution).

¹⁹⁶US Military Government Unit, Palau Islands - *Monthly Report of Activities for August 1946*.

first aid station.¹⁹⁷ Training for nurses and Islander hospital corpsmen consisted of 20 hours of basic English in addition to "routine hospital nursing and first aid procedures".¹⁹⁸ Students also learned the basics of field nursing in theory lessons at Koror hospital and through practical experience in the field.¹⁹⁹ During sick call and rounds at the hospital, the instructors, medical officers and hospital corpsmen pointed out symptoms of various illnesses to the students to add to their practical knowledge.²⁰⁰

Attending nursing and other medical training also provided an avenue for learning English and earning money. In January 1947 Military Government noted that "where at the beginning only three girls were capable of acting as interpreters, eight girls and three boys now function in this capacity".²⁰¹ In March a more comprehensive English programme was introduced with the arrival of a US Army Medical Officer, who was an Hawaiian born Japanese-American. Under his supervision each student had 4 hours of training in language every week and "pronunciation and vocabulary [were] noticeably much improved".²⁰² Pay was not high - nurses and aides earned between \$10 and \$16 per month and hospital corpsmen between \$10 and \$14.²⁰³

By late 1947 each nurse or medical trainee had enough background knowledge to be made responsible for a small group of patients. Trainees attended to their nursing care, medication needs and kept patient charts up to date.²⁰⁴ The most promising

¹⁹⁷*US Military Government Unit, Palau Islands - Monthly Report of Activities for December 1946.* p. 3. (Part I of Report held at Hoover Institution).

¹⁹⁸*Ibid.*

¹⁹⁹*US Military Government Unit, Palau Islands - Monthly Report of Activities for October 1946.* p. 5.

²⁰⁰*US Military Government Unit, Palau Islands - Monthly Report of Activities for January 1947.* pp. 3-4.

²⁰¹*Ibid.*

²⁰²*US Military Government Unit, Palau Islands - Monthly Report of Activities for March 1947.* p. 3.

²⁰³*Ibid.*

²⁰⁴*US Civil Administration Unit, Palau Islands - Quarterly Report of Activities for Quarter ending 30 September 1947.* p. 6.

female students were sent to Guam to attend nursing school, while talented men went to the school for medical practitioners.²⁰⁵

Minoru Ueki recalls that in 1947 the

opportunity to go to schools was very limited [and] there were only two places that we were given opportunity to go to - there was one for becoming a teacher and one for somewhere in the health field.²⁰⁶

Minoru, as a part Japanese, had been repatriated to Japan with his father. In late 1947 he met a group of Palauan men who were coming back from serving in New Guinea via Japan.²⁰⁷ As they were returning to Koror, he seized the chance and travelled back with them. The trip was broken up by a stay in the camp for Japanese in Guam. Minoru was "treated very badly, like a war criminal".²⁰⁸ His month there was made bearable by a visit from his sister, who was attending nursing school.

When he got back to Koror, Minoru's strongest desire was to go to school and make a future for himself, so he was willing to do "any work that might land me a chance to go to school". He took a job in the hospital, because from there Americans were selecting people to go on to further training. From raking leaves in the yard, he was promoted to house boy then laundry worker, kitchen hand and health assistant. Finally he was able to attend medical school as he wished.²⁰⁹

During this period Minoru still carried a "guarded feeling" around Americans. He worked extremely hard so as to avoid confrontations because he was afraid that if he got into conflict with an American, "all things would come out". Often the Americans would joke around and "box and play", but when they hit him in fun, Minoru would feel himself become "very rigid - it was a very bad feeling...so I walk away".²¹⁰

²⁰⁵Ibid.

²⁰⁶Dr. Minoru Ueki.

²⁰⁷See Ubal Tellei, "Palauans and the Japanese Military Experience" (Translated by Patrick Tellei) in White (ed.) *Remembering the Pacific War*. p. 159.

²⁰⁸Dr. Minoru Ueki.

²⁰⁹Ibid.

²¹⁰Ibid.

Trainee health aides lived in dormitories near the hospital - one for female nurses and one for Palauan corpsmen. Kiari Yaoch was house mother in the nurses dormitory, supervising meals and laundry. She also assisted in preparing food for the patients.²¹¹ Her son, Felix, stayed at the hospital in the men's dormitory where he got to know Minoru Ueki. They had never met before. As Felix explains,

he grew up as a Japanese and I grew up as a Palauan. His father was Japanese and he went to a Japanese school and I went to a native school so we didn't see each other until that time.²¹²

Minoru remembers Felix would come along and say "Never mind the study, let's go!" Together they would visit the Catholic church at Topside where the resident priest spoke Japanese. As Minoru was most comfortable with the Japanese language and actually spoke very little Palauan, he fitted in well. The priest provided him with books and "tutored [him] to become Catholic".²¹³ Often Felix and Minoru would attend movies together up at Topside. The church there doubled as a movie theatre. Felix had become friends with the navy corpsman who was also the movie projector operator. This man would pick Felix up and take him down to the church where they would show movies. In 1947 Felix "saw 365 movies in English without knowing what they were saying!" The one movie he remembers most distinctly was "the earthquake of San Francisco".²¹⁴

Living in the dormitory, Felix had regular contact with Americans.

There were navy corpsmen there at the hospital so everyday I would be in contact with them and would come back with English lessons that I learned at school from the teachers who learned from the soldier instructors and transmitted them to us so we got it second or third hand and sometimes they [the corpsmen] would correct my pronunciation because I would just read them a sentence...and they would say "no, no it's like this". And I would sing some of the songs that I would pick up and then they would hear me sing so they would correct me so I was always in contact with them.²¹⁵

²¹¹Kiari Yaoch (W 1910).

²¹²Father Felix Yaoch.

²¹³Dr. Minoru Ueki.

²¹⁴Father Felix Yaoch. The movie is *San Francisco* (MGM 1936).

²¹⁵Ibid.

Felix may have picked up some of his songs from staying in the hospital employees quarters. In late 1947 singing lessons were introduced for the trainees. For one hour each evening medical officers ran singing classes in the nurses' home which "were received with enthusiasm by all employees".²¹⁶ "Group singing" for students in the health field continued twice weekly through 1948 and the navy administration commented that - "It is gratifying to hear them singing American songs now almost as frequently as they do Japanese and other songs."²¹⁷ Administration was also well pleased that nurses were now able to run "sick call" almost entirely by themselves and that they were also quite capable of scrubbing and assisting in surgery.²¹⁸ Aides continued to be rotated through the Koror hospital back out to their field stations, so that each could receive further training, some in specific fields such as X-ray and obstetrics.²¹⁹ Out in the field, villages were now asked to help pay the cost of employing their nurses, which was agreed to with "the highest approval of the chiefs in that now they can get a great deal more work from the nurse's aids and health aids".²²⁰

For some time the only constant contacts people on Babeldaob had with American Palau were the nurses appointed to districts to run dispensaries, the elementary school teachers trained in Koror and Guam, and Palauans who came and went to Koror to buy stock for community owned and run trade stores. People on Babeldaob only saw real Americans when field trip parties visited. This occurred at regular, but brief and infrequent, intervals. Field trips to Babeldaob were only inaugurated in October 1946 so there were parts of Palau that had seen little of

²¹⁶US Civil Administration Unit, *Palau Islands - Quarterly Report of Activities for October, November and December 1947*. p. 5.

²¹⁷US Civil Administration Unit, *Palau Islands - Quarterly Report No 3-48 for months of April, May and June 1948*. p. 6.

²¹⁸Ibid.

²¹⁹Ibid. and US Civil Administration Unit, *Palau Islands - Quarterly Report 4-48 for the months of July, August and September 1948*. p. 5.

²²⁰US Civil Administration Unit, *Palau Islands - Quarterly Report 4-48 for the months of July, August and September 1948*. p. 5.

Americans for more than a year after the war.²²¹ While people in Koror were making connections with Americans and grasping opportunities, many others in the outer districts were still unsure of them.

Lieutenant Johnson, one of the medical officers who went on these trips, "took a liking" to Minoru Ueki.²²² As he and his wife had no children of their own, the officer asked Minoru to live with them, so he moved out of the the hospital dormitory and stayed with the family until they left Palau. Minoru often acted as Johnson's assistant on field trips to Babeldaob and the Southwest Islands.

Conditions were often uncomfortable and difficult. Sometimes the behaviour of the American members of the ship's crew towards Islanders could be harsh. On an April 1948 trip to the Southwest Islands, officer-in-charge Lt. McKinney, reported that "several incidents that happened aboard do not reflect any too well on the crew".²²³ The schedule of business activities on the islands forced the native party, which included health assistants, Island Trading Company traders and a census taker, to eat at "irregular hours". Arrangements had been made by the executive officer to cope with this, but

the ship's cook circumvented his orders and as a result most of the people missed a majority of the meals served. This fact was not made known to this officer until the day after the ship had departed from Koror for Guam. On one occasion the cook used profanity toward Roisbong [the Palauan in charge of Sanitation]...calling him a _____ native, (word supplied on request), and deliberately threw a bucket down the hatch of the crew's quarters at him striking him on the leg. There were other occasions of unnecessary profanity and roughness toward the official party that do not reflect credit toward the Naval Service or the Americans as a whole.²²⁴

²²¹*US Naval Military Government Unit, Palau Islands - Monthly Report of Activities for October 1946.* p. 5.

²²²Dr. Minoru Ueki.

²²³Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands, Office of the Civil Administrator, Palau District *From Lieutenant H.R. McKinney, USN to Civil Administrator, Palau District : Field Trip to Southern Islands; Report on, 4 May 1948.* p. 4, labelled Enclosure (E). (Held at Hoover Institution).

²²⁴*Ibid.*

As well as coping with Americans who lacked "the rudiments of common decency and courtesy", Palauans, because of lack of space, were forced on this voyage and others to sleep on the deck, which "was not wholly dry at any time".²²⁵

Minoru Ueki's recollection of these voyages, however, is of the work that was done on arrival. The party set up free clinics, mostly treating patients for yaws, but they also encouraged people to come to the clinic for check-ups.²²⁶ During field trips sanitary conditions in the villages were checked, all schools were inspected and a meeting was held with village leaders to inform them of military government policy and to discuss various issues.²²⁷ Augusta Ramarui was in Ngchesar, which was not far from Koror, but she recalls that field visits were always very brief. There was no need for the party to stay overnight as they could comfortably return to Koror the same day.

They came to village and they give us a talk about a lot of things - some from hospital with a Palauan nurse and some from administration. At that time I really don't know how to describe them, why they come. Sometimes they come with the interpreters, but I don't believe that [they] were able enough to really relay a message.²²⁸

Not everybody came out to see the field party. Dengelei Saburo also lived in Ngchesar after the war, but she does not recall Americans visiting at all. The only time she saw them was when she visited Koror.²²⁹ Skesuk Skang does not remember Americans coming to Ngarchelong but she does recall the chief reporting to the community about what they were doing and his continuing assurance that "the Americans were nice people".²³⁰

²²⁵Ibid. For poor on-board conditions for Palauans see also - From Lieutenant Harold G. Gibson to Civil Administrator, Palau : *Field Trip to Southern islands: Report on, 7 July 1948*. p. 4, labelled Enclosure (E). (Held at Hoover Institution).

²²⁶Dr. Minoru Ueki.

²²⁷US Naval Military Government Unit, Palau Islands - *Monthly Report of Activities for October 1946*. p. 5.

²²⁸Augusta Ramarui (W 1923).

²²⁹Dengelei Saburo.

²³⁰Skesuk Skang.

The monthly report for March 1947 shows that the amount of American contact varied with different areas. While "continuous contact" was maintained with Aimeliik and Airai through visits once or several times per month, the more northern area of Ngarchelong and central Ngeremenglui were only visited twice in five months.²³¹ From 1948 to 1951 field trips became more regular and were made each month, alternating between the Southwest Islands, (Sonsorol, Pulo Anna, Merir and Tobi) and Babeldaob. The trips lasted between five and ten days, depending on the area to be covered.²³²

Field trips had a consistent structure. A senior officer was placed in charge of a party of American personnel and Palauan assistants. The operating instructions for a January 1948 field trip list four Americans - the officer in charge (SONA graduate Lt. F.W. Avila), medical officer (Lt. (jg) E.P. Johnson) and two enlisted men (both pharmacist mates). There were also seven Palauans, including an interpreter, people in charge of sanitation, police, court matters and census collection.²³³ Sometimes passengers were included - Palauans returning to their homes, or wives and children of navy men along for recreation.²³⁴ This January 1948 trip lasted six days and went swiftly from Koror to Ngchesar and back and then onto Ngarchelong, Ngardmau, Ngeremenglui and Ngatpang before returning to base. On any field trip no more than a day was spent in one place. On some occasions the party would disembark in the late afternoon, carry out most of their duties, spend the night and leave the next morning. At other times they could arrive and depart within two hours.²³⁵ However short their stay, the main duties were the same. An administrative and sanitary inspection was followed by sick call and census collection. Then a meeting was held, during which

²³¹US Military Government Unit, Palau Islands - *Monthly Report of Activities for March 1947*. Enclosure (E).

²³²See various field trip reports 1948 - 1951.

²³³Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands, Office of the Civil Administrator, Palau District - *Operations Instructions CAU Palau No. 2-48*, 12 January 1948, labelled Exhibit III to Enclosure (A). (Held at Hoover Institution).

²³⁴See various field trip reports 1948 - 1951. For example Civil Administration Unit, Palau District - *Operations Instructions CAU Palau No. 11-48*, 17 August 1948. (Held at Hoover Institution).

²³⁵See various field trip reports 1948 - 1951.

instructions were issued about various new policies. Finally, economic activity in the area was discussed and new commercial possibilities encouraged. Copra and handicrafts were bought, trade goods sold and any special requests were made by the people. These were generally for building materials or equipment.²³⁶ On the party's return, the officer-in-charge presented a report to the civil administrator. This organization and procedure changed only marginally throughout the naval government period.²³⁷

From an examination of the reports it is clear that the major focus during all trips was sanitary inspection, which comprised continuous efforts to establish a consistent and effective sanitary programme in the villages.²³⁸ In 1946 village policemen acted as sanitary inspectors.²³⁹ The following year full-time inspectors appointed by villages themselves were placed under the supervision of district nurses or health aides. This was ineffective, as they were not paid and many resented being under the authority of a young female nurse. The infrequency of inspection field trips in the early years of navy government also added to the problem.²⁴⁰ From 1948 local sanitary inspectors were hired by civil administration and trained by the sanitation officer.²⁴¹ Their abilities and understanding varied, so sanitary conditions in villages also contrasted greatly.²⁴²

The problems CivAd encountered in maintaining sanitary conditions in the outer areas reveal the disparity between the more modern Palau of Koror and less Americanized Babeldaob. Without constant contact with Americans, Palauans on

²³⁶Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands, Office of the Civil Administrator, Palau District - *Operations Instructions CAU Palau No. 2-48*, 12 January 1948.

²³⁷See *Operations Instructions* for field trips in 1949-1950.

²³⁸See field trip reports 1948 through 1951.

²³⁹*US Naval Military Government Unit, Palau Islands - Monthly Report of Activities for December 1946*, p. 4.

²⁴⁰*US Civil Administration Unit, Palau Islands - Quarterly Report 2-48 for the months of January, February and March 1948*, p. 6.

²⁴¹*Ibid.*, p. 7.

²⁴²*Ibid.*

Babeldaob had difficulty in really understanding what the administration wanted.

Arriving in Ngiwal in December 1949, it was clear to the field trip party

that much last minute work had been done in this municipality to clean up their village. The paths had all been swept in the past two hours, but there was much debree [sic] lying on the ground along the paths and around the homes. Also much fruit was observed on the ground evidently blown there from recent winds.²⁴³

After inspection a meeting was held and

it was impressed on the people that it is not our desire for them to clean up their municipality only when a field trip party is expected, but rather for them to realize that the importance lies in the fact that its their health and happiness that we are primarily concerned about.²⁴⁴

Palauans in some outer areas were cleaning up because they knew that was what the party came to inspect. With only a brief explanation a few times a year, many did not understand the reason why things were supposed to be done in a certain manner. The Japanese had not explained why at all, but there was always a clear message that there was only one correct way of doing things. Under the Americans there was no punishment if villages were not cleaned perfectly or orders followed to the letter. Americans also encouraged people to think and make decisions on their own, so it was often easier to revert to the way they had done things under Japanese administration.

Not only sanitary practices were affected by this kind of confusion. Over a number of trips to different places in 1949, Palauans continually questioned American practices with regard to the sale of copra. People all over Babeldaob complained about having to buy copra sacks from the Island Trading Company and then "not receiving any credit for them upon selling the copra".²⁴⁵ Lt. McKinney reported that "this situation is slowly becoming a major problem".²⁴⁶ In Ngaraard the district magistrate

²⁴³Civil Administration Unit, Palau Islands, *From The Field Trip Officer to The Civil Administrator : Field Trip East Side of Babelthuap; Report on*, 19 December 1949. p. 28. (Held at Hoover Institution).

²⁴⁴Ibid.

²⁴⁵Civil Administration Unit, Palau Islands, *From The Field Trip Officer to The Civil Administrator : Report of field Trip to Babelthuap*, 10 January 1949, p. 1. (Held at Hoover Institution).

²⁴⁶Ibid. p. 3.

asked the officer-in-charge "why they had to buy copra bags" pointing out that "the Japanese formerly furnished these bags free".²⁴⁷

In late 1948 field trip officer, Lieutenant King, complained in his report about the "hopeless" manner of keeping municipal accounts in many districts. He realized however that it was because "the clerk had not the slightest conception of bookkeeping principles".²⁴⁸ Under the Japanese Palauans were never responsible for such paper work, so experience in this area was limited. The clerk was told to come to Koror "for instructions at the CAU office".²⁴⁹

In the outer areas of Babeldaob Japanese influence was often retained more than it was in Koror, where the continuous presence of Americans began to erase 'oriental' customs.²⁵⁰ Education, employment and recreation with Americans in Koror encouraged free will and resourcefulness. On Babeldaob, even more than in Koror, people still expected to be told what to do and because of years under the Japanese lacked the confidence, or regarded it as wrong, to act on their own. As people in these areas only saw navy personnel rarely, they adopted only parts of the way of life Americans offered.

On Kayangel in early 1948 the people requested quonset huts as they had seen so many other districts acquire them. Lt. McKinney told them

they were expensive, required considerable maintenance to prevent rusting, and that there were only a limited number available, and that the needs of the Palau people could best be served by reserving these for people in less fortunate areas, the Kayangel people having practically no war damage. They, however, persisted in their desire for the huts.²⁵¹

²⁴⁷Civil Administration Unit, Palau Islands, *From The Field Trip Officer to The Civil Administrator : Field Trip East Side of Babelthuap; Report on*, 19 December 1949, p. 28.

²⁴⁸From Lt. M.C. King, USN to Civil Administrator, Palau : *Field Trip to Babelthuap and Kayangel Report of*, 22 September 1948. p. 1, labelled Enclosure (K). (Held at Hoover Institution).

²⁴⁹*Ibid.*

²⁵⁰US Civil Administration Unit, Palau Islands - *Quarterly Report of Activities for Quarter ending 30 September 1947*. p. 18 - "Acculturation is proceeding in the Palaus mainly on the islands of Koror, Peleliu and Angaur. The people are losing some of their Japanese traits and assuming American ones. Movies have a decided influence on Palauans for example : "Cowboy" means one is "strong and lucky". American styles of dress are seen among the people, and their eating habits include the use of fork and spoon instead of chopsticks."

²⁵¹US Civil Administration Unit, Palau Islands *Report From Lt. H.R. McKinney, USN, OinC Field Party No. 4-48 to The Civil Administrator, Palau District - Field Trip # 4-48*. p. 1.

The next year the field trip party to Babeldaob was instructed to "Investigate possibility of starting a baseball league and sports program".²⁵² Most districts on the east and west coasts said they would like to take part in such a program.²⁵³ Some recalled the sports competitions held under Japanese administration.²⁵⁴ Others may have seen Americans and Palauans playing baseball, softball and basketball against each other in Koror.²⁵⁵

One American observer of Palauan life in the outer districts was Homer G. Barnett, who stayed for nine months during 1947-48 in Ulimang, a village in Ngaraard.²⁵⁶ During that time he kept "a record of on-going events".²⁵⁷ His unpublished notebooks reveal the way in which Palauans accepted only some parts of American culture. Lifestyle in Ngaraard comprised a mixture of Japanese/Palauan culture and the beginnings of American ways.²⁵⁸ He refers to the Palauans who associated regularly with Americans and had travelled beyond Ngaraard, as the "fast set" or the "smart set".²⁵⁹ They were more likely to use English words and phrases, wear American style clothes and adopt American behaviour. One day he watched a group of young boys and girls playing "blackjack". Even the "fast set" used Japanese terms for some of the parts of the game, but they used English to count, especially for

²⁵²Civil Administration Unit, Palau Islands - *Operating Instructions COMNAVFORWESCAR NO. 8-49*, 2 June 1949. (Held at Hoover Institution).

²⁵³US Civil Administration Unit, Palau Islands Report *From Field Trip Officer to The Civil Administrator - Field trip, East Side Babelthuap*, 3 June 1949 and *Field Trip, West Side Babelthuap*, 8 July 1949. (Held at Hoover Institution).

²⁵⁴Fumio Rengiil (M 1917) & Ascension Ngelmas.

²⁵⁵See *US Naval Military Government, Palau Islands - Monthly Report of Activities for October 1946*. p. 4.

²⁵⁶Introduction to Homer G. Barnett, *Being a Palauan* (Case Studies in Anthropology, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York, 1960) p. 3.

²⁵⁷Ibid.

²⁵⁸Barnett, *Palauan Notebooks*. (Series III, Box 2).

²⁵⁹Barnett, *Palau - Non-Material Culture Book 1* - date 12/16 [1947], p. 11. and date 1/3 [1948], p. 28. (Series III, Box 2).

"20" and "21" and "blackjack".²⁶⁰ The "more unsophisticated" of the group picked up English phrases too, such as "next time" and "sorry boys" but the context in which they said the words showed that they did not really understand the meaning.²⁶¹

In early 1948, Barnett attended a celebration at Ngarchelong for Melekeok people and for CivAd representatives who had helped provide quonset material to build two meeting houses. At the gathering, American songs such as 'My Blue Heaven' and 'Mexicali Rose' were sung in Japanese.²⁶² On another occasion he witnessed dances which were American style, the 'one step' and 'two step', but they had been learned during Japanese times.²⁶³

Attitudes to Americans were mixed. Some people adopted American "style" wholeheartedly, without creating any disturbance in the community. Barnett saw a woman dressed in khaki shorts smoking a cigarette and "her garb seemed to cause no special interest or concern".²⁶⁴ On other occasions it seemed that American behaviour was regarded by some people as humorous. At the celebration mentioned above, one of the Palauan skits performed showed their humorous interpretation of American justice.²⁶⁵ A peeping tom, who was caught watching a girl bathing was brought before an American police sergeant and

what followed was a hilarious presentation of the sequel as seen by the Palauans : the few words of English that they knew came out of an unintelligible mumble by the sergeant. There was confusion but finally the peeping tom got a few months jail sentence.²⁶⁶

Some people adopted pieces of American English conversation - saying "o.k" and "all right" and school children annoyed Barnett with their constant repetition of

²⁶⁰Ibid. date 12/16 [1947], p. 11.

²⁶¹Ibid.

²⁶²Ibid. date 1/3 [1948], p. 24.

²⁶³Ibid. p. 28.

²⁶⁴Barnett, *Palau - Non-Material Culture Book I* - date 11/15. p. 3.

²⁶⁵The performance of a short "skit" for entertainment was based on the customary Japanese "shibai". Barnett, *Being a Palauan*. p. 77.

²⁶⁶Barnett, *Palau - Non-Material Culture Book I* - date 1/3. p. 24.

"goodbye".²⁶⁷ One woman named her son "Hairs", a interpretation of the name of the American doctor (Harrison) who delivered him in Koror.²⁶⁸ Yet others complained about how times were very different now than they were under the Japanese - "then the Palauans did as told" and now they do whatever they want. One 50 year old man implied to Barnett that it would be better for the Americans "to tell the Palauans what is good not let them determine for themselves".²⁶⁹ Another older man criticized the behaviour of many young people under American administration. In the "old days" children listened to their fathers regarding the choice of a marriage partner. "Today it is different - the children suit themselves".²⁷⁰

People on Babeldaob seemed to be willing and desirous of adopting many superficial American things but as CivAd began to see

The people will say yes to anything that the Americans say and it isn't until you can observe the spirit with which the order or suggestion is carried out, that you know how it is received.²⁷¹

In 1948, John Useem became aware that sometimes people did things or said they would do them because it seemed to be what Americans wanted.

I used to be fascinated watching it because they [the Americans] would suggest something and people there would look at each other and say something non-descript and then...Americans would say "Well, how about it - what did we decide?" and they'd say "Well, we've really got to talk about it and think about it". So they would go back and there would be a long negotiation and the Americans would call a meeting and they'd say they weren't quite ready for it...and they would say "I guess the Americans are getting very upset - we'd better do something". So they would compromise something but would never really enforce it or [they would] reinterpret it in a different way, or go back and tell the Americans they had done what they said but the people there weren't sure they wanted it.²⁷²

²⁶⁷Ibid. p. 82.

²⁶⁸Ibid.

²⁶⁹Ibid. p. 86.

²⁷⁰Ibid. p. 168.

²⁷¹US Civil Administration Unit, Palau Islands - Quarterly Report No 3-48 for months of April, May and June 1948. p. 22.

²⁷²John Useem.

One major area in which this type of cautious or partial acceptance occurred was in the adoption of American changes to the Palauan system of government. As a result of direct Japanese rule and the extreme disruption caused by the war, traditional political leadership and governing systems in Palau had completely broken down.²⁷³ However, when Military Government first arrived in Koror, the administration accepted the two traditional high chiefs, Aibedul and Reklai, as the supreme leaders in Palau. With a council of advisers, they were placed at the head of a central Palau Government.²⁷⁴ At all other levels, "USNMG has been very discreet in its supervision of native government. The encouragement of native leadership has been fostered".²⁷⁵

During 1947-48 this system underwent various changes. In mid 1947 Military Government reported that

Most of the Chiefs have had little or no experience in administration under the Japanese, for they were deprived of much of their authority. The few trained administrators, who have some culture due to the influence of traders, missionaries or travel, act as subordinates to the hereditary chiefs.

The Anachronistic practice of previous Military Government Officers in installing the hereditary offices, instead of electing or appointing these trained administrators has caused reverses to the democratic ideal and create new stresses within the native society. The Palauans who have attended school disrespect the chiefs and there is much complaint that the youngsters do not hear the voice of the chief.²⁷⁶

These "trained administrators" gained more opportunities with the establishment in mid 1948 of sixteen districts or municipalities across Palau, because each district was required to have an elected magistrate as well as the hereditary chief.²⁷⁷ The creation of the elected position of magistrate and the encouragement of voting in all districts was expected to fulfil the civil administration's aim of fostering democracy in Palau. This

²⁷³Force, *Leadership and Cultural Change in Palau*. p.72. & Nero "Time of Famine..." in White and Lindstrom ed., p. 123.

²⁷⁴US Naval Military Government, *Palau Islands - Monthly Report of Activities for December 1946*. p. 6. This was the first report to discuss military government policy in relation to Palauan government.

²⁷⁵Ibid.

²⁷⁶US Naval Military Government Unit, *Palau Islands - Quarterly Report of Activities for April, May and June 1947*. p. 13.

²⁷⁷US Civil Administration Unit, *Palau Islands - Quarterly Report No. 3-48 for months of April, May and June 1948*. pp. 9-10.

situation did lead to very gradual changes in the power structure of the islands. Some people, particularly the new educated and young elite, liked these changes; others, mostly older people, disliked them. In many outer areas Palauans really did not understand what was supposed to be happening. By 1950 an American survey revealed that

In our zeal to develop self-government as we know it, the positions of magistrate, clerk, and members of council were established by Civads and elections have been held in many places by Civad official for these positions. In all instances, the concept of democratic elections was a foreign idea to the local people, and in many instances the idea apparently went over the heads of the new voters.²⁷⁸

Particularly in outer areas the ideals of democracy and the methods of voting were introduced and explained to Islanders over

a few hours contact with local municipalities by Civad officials once in three months, as a general rule. More frequent contacts were available for those communities close to Civad centers.²⁷⁹

The survey concluded that "for the introduction of a completely different political concept, it was probably expecting too much for any real meaning to be absorbed from such brief contacts."²⁸⁰

Some Palauans do not recall voting at all during the navy government period. Direou Orrukei, who lived in Melekeok after the war, does not remember elections in navy times - "The elections are just recent". She also suggests that "people in Koror would know more about it".²⁸¹ Similarly Saruang Bekemekmad, in Ngaraard, knew nothing of American government and did not vote for a magistrate in those years.²⁸² Even close to Koror some people had nothing to do with the new system of elections.

²⁷⁸Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands - *Management Survey*, October 1950 - prepared by Theodore W. Taylor, Chief, Administration Division, Office of Territories, Department of the Interior. p. 3. (RG 38, Box 1).

²⁷⁹Ibid.

²⁸⁰Ibid.

²⁸¹Direou Orrukei.

²⁸²Saruang Bekemekmad.

A woman who lived in Ngermid recalls that "at that time there were no elections. Each village continued traditional customs and had traditional chief."²⁸³

In July 1949 a field trip party headed by Lieutenants Stille and Frink toured east and west Babeldaob to supervise the election of magistrates as well as carry out other usual duties.²⁸⁴ Their report stated that "At all of the municipalities visited, the people were stressed with the importance of voting".²⁸⁵ Participation in the election varied from place to place but overall Stille concluded, "it is anticipated that a better percentage of voters will be had in the next election".²⁸⁶ Voting averages were actually quite high. Between 50% and 90% of eligible voters took part with the average for each district being 75%.²⁸⁷

The figures, however, do not reflect understanding of the voting process or acceptance of its results. Palauans varied in their responses to the changes elections brought about. At first, eligible candidates were nearly always selected from the higher clans, the elite group of the society who held the respect of the community.²⁸⁸ Jonathon Emul recalls that there were no election campaigns then and "the election was such that those traditionally recognized people and from the high clans were the ones most likely to become the leader".²⁸⁹ On John Useem's 1948 visit to Palau he heard people debating about who they should or were supposed to elect.

And the general tendency at first was to elect the senior ranking people, but they discovered that when they went down there [to Koror], there was an awful lot of pressures from the US government for them to go back and do things that they didn't want

²⁸³Woman, Ngermid.

²⁸⁴Civil Administration Unit, Palau Islands - *Operations Instructions COMNAVFORWESCAR No. 10-49*, 8 July 1949. (Held at Hoover Institution).

²⁸⁵Civil Administration Unit, Palau Islands - *Report From The Field Trip Officer to The Civil Administrator- Field Trip East Side of Babelthuap*, 16 July 1949. p. 2. (Held at Hoover Institution).

²⁸⁶*Ibid.*

²⁸⁷Calculated from numbers of eligible and actual voters reported in Civil Administration Unit, Palau Islands - *Report From The Field Trip Officer to The Civil Administrator- Field Trip East Side of Babelthuap*, 16 July 1949 and *Report From The Field Trip Officer to The Civil Administrator- Field Trip West Side of Babelthuap, Peleliu and Angaur*, 23 July 1949. (Held at Hoover Institution).

²⁸⁸Jonathon Emul and others.

²⁸⁹Jonathon Emul.

to do or were difficult to do - so they began to elect a relative of the senior ranking people.²⁹⁰

Some people did not like the idea of anyone other than the hereditary chief gaining a position of power. Dengelei Saburo thought that elections were one of the "negative" things brought about under American administration.

In Japanese times somebody inherits the title. They inherit it, but in American times you have elections and get somebody who probably doesn't have the heart and the will to do it, even though he probably has the skills and the knowledge.²⁹¹

Even if the person held a position of respect in the community, some people felt that because the leader did not inherit the title, he could not have "the power or the will" to tell people what to do. Therefore people would only obey this leader if they wanted to.

As Jonathon Emul saw it

even if there was a free election and freedom of choice, people tend to select the guy who was permitted or they go and say 'Who are you? Who the hell are you to run for something like that?'²⁹²

Skasuk Skang too did not like the new arrangement, "It was complicated", because often if a new, non-hereditary, leader was chosen, he would not listen to the elders in the way the traditional chief would.²⁹³ Dengelei saw that some Palauans liked the new concept of elected magistrate and "wanted it" but

maybe there were some who did not decide on that but there was nothing to do because it was all over Palau and since it was from Americans we had to do it, we felt we had to do it.²⁹⁴

Voting "was kind of a new experience" recalls Alfonso Oiterong and "we were not at ease at the beginning" when the American began to set up the new municipal government system. Often people only knew that the Americans wanted them to vote. Karmelong Mengur did not know anything about the American system of government

²⁹⁰John Useem.

²⁹¹Dengelei Saburo.

²⁹²Jonathon Emul.

²⁹³Skasuk Skang.

²⁹⁴Dengelei Saburo.

but he remembers voting. He was comfortable with the idea that anyone could become leader because

for example if this village had to elect one, we would all know who was able to and who had nice attitudes, and who had the characteristics and everything - because there were some people who were able to do the job but if they had a bad attitude, they would not be in it...in the pre-election we would all tell them [the chosen candidates] - "You go run".²⁹⁵

Augusta Ramarui recalls that when elections were first held candidates were selected from upper clans, but that was "in the very beginning and then later on it became more democratically oriented and then they began looking for educated people".²⁹⁶ Gradually some people began looking for someone new - "someone who knew English, someone who has education".²⁹⁷ Education and the ability to communicate with Americans became the qualities that could lead anyone into a position of power. Men like Jonathon Emul, Minoru Ueki and Wilhelm Rengiil, who had been educated under the Japanese and continued their training under American administration, gradually moved into higher positions in the government of Palau.²⁹⁸

The split in opinions about elections, as in other issues, was often between the younger, educated people and older people whose attitudes had been formed under Japanese administration. In late 1947 CivAd noted that in terms of acculturation

The Palauans can be divided into three groups: (1) the older people who cling strongly to native customs and traditions; (2) the middle aged who are Japanese-Palauans; (3) the younger people who are Japanese-American-Palauan.²⁹⁹

²⁹⁵Karmelong Mengur.

²⁹⁶Augusta Ramarui.

²⁹⁷Skasuk Skang.

²⁹⁸Jonathon Emul was a Congressman and Speaker before he stepped out of politics. When I interviewed them in 1990, Dr. Minoru Ueki was a Senator and Wilhelm Rengiil was Special Adviser to the President.

²⁹⁹*US Civil Administration Unit, Palau Islands - Quarterly Report for months of October, November and December 1947.* Enclosure (A) p. 18.

Some young people saw the Americans as their way of escaping the confines of both Palauan customs and the authoritarianism and discipline cultivated under the Japanese. Barnett talked to one young man in 1948 who told him that

the young people, like himself - he means progressive - are much concerned about rumor that all Navy Americans except 2 have left Yap, abandoning it as they see it, to reaction + old custom. [He] asked me if I thought Americans would do that to Palau. He is disturbed + says if they do, he will leave Palau to go to some other island. He says young Palauans are just hanging on hoping Americans will help them under-cut the high chiefs like Reklai and Abedul who have not been to school and hang onto old customs like omulusul, collective responsibility (as opposed to individualism).³⁰⁰

Useem was aware of the reliance of young people on the Americans. He witnessed "a great struggle going on" between older established men and women and the young people

who wanted to follow the foreign ways, they wanted to get foreign jobs, they wanted to earn foreign money. They were sick and tired of old Palau customs...they came to me, they came to everybody, they came to the US government people, they came to the chiefs, they came to the village communities and said that they wanted a new kind of society in which they would be free of the old customs...and a lot of young people made an escape to Koror.³⁰¹

He also saw conflict between people who were more at home with Japanese ways of getting things done and those who preferred American style. There was

a real struggle between those [people] who were branded as Japanese style administrators, who were vigorous, self contained - gave orders as a sharp thing and the Americans who would say "we'd like to suggest you do this" or "would you like to do that?"³⁰²

The conflicts that Useem saw and the discussions he heard revealed to him

a serious continuing conversation between people as to what to do, how to do it, who to do it - [about] relations with foreigners and what could they expect from the foreigners.³⁰³

³⁰⁰H.G. Barnett, *Palau Journal Book 3*, date 5/7/ [1948]. p. 153.

³⁰¹John Useem.

³⁰²*Ibid.*

³⁰³*Ibid.*

While Americans offered more freedom of choice about the future, circumstances resulting from American occupation in some places restricted the ability of Palauans to take up opportunities or to do what they wished. On Peleliu and Angaur, some of the changes that took place during the navy government period ultimately limited the possibilities available to Palauans.

When the Peleliuans returned to their home from Babeldaob, the long presence of Americans had established a small, productive American quonset town. It was easy to make an income as there were many jobs available working at the naval air base. Quonset accommodation was already built and people moved in immediately. The people had everything they could want as Peleliu was the incoming supply centre for all goods and war surplus was everywhere in great quantities. Food for workers was almost entirely supplied by Americans as people had no time to fish or establish gardens. However in April 1951, not long before the navy left Palau, the field trip officer reported that "Generally speaking Peleliu presents one of the major problems of the Palau district".³⁰⁴ The report pointed out that

During the war and immediately following a false economy was established, due to the number of Americans based on the island. After the closing of Peleliu the people were able to sell or trade junk that had been left...however now that most of the usable items are now gone, and lacking any source of reliable income, the people are in somewhat of an economic vacuum.³⁰⁵

The market for handicraft was "spasmodic". An attempt at establishing a fishing industry failed due to lack of transport to Guam and the absence of a market. Copra production was hampered, as all over Palau, by the ravages of the coconut beetle.³⁰⁶ People who had been used to being employed and paid by Americans had to leave to find work. Even the American established housing became a negative. As the 1951 report described,

³⁰⁴Civil Administration Unit, Palau District - Report *From The Field Trip Officer to The Civil Administrator, Palau District: Field Trip to Angaur and Peleliu*, April 1951. p. 83. (Held at Hoover Institution).

³⁰⁵*Ibid.*

³⁰⁶*Ibid.*

As a result of the invasion of Peleliu the homes of the people were destroyed, and as a temporary measure they have been living in quonsets. While these serve as a roof they are far from desirable, and are by no means permanent. Most of the quonsets are very clean inside, but the arrangement of the villages is poor. Many are located very close to each other, and are dark and lack ventilation. It is highly desirable that some sort of cheap permanent housing be developed, however the lack of income presents a real problem, and a scarcity of lumber prevents any project for wood construction.³⁰⁷

Angaur had a similar background. During 1946 the American owned Pomeroy Company, under navy contract, reopened the German established/Japanese developed phosphate mine and almost all Angaurese were employed in some capacity. Income was high and food supplied as workers had little time to fish or garden to provide their own food.³⁰⁸ In January 1947 military government complained about "inflation" on the island explaining that

the high wages of the imported [Japanese] and US workers of Pomeroy and the inability to spend their wages elsewhere cause prices of native goods to highly fluctuate both in the legitimate and the black market.³⁰⁹

Six months later, the Japanese government took over mining operations under the supervision of SCAP (Supreme Commander Allied Powers), MacArthur's military government command in Tokyo.³¹⁰ Angaurese were still hired, but only in addition to imported Japanese workers. However, the presence of the economically successful phosphate mine and the royalties which, by agreement, were paid into a trust fund for the Angaurese for the use of their land, meant that Angaur did not fall into an "economic vacuum" like Peleliu. Although economically more fortunate, the Angaurese nonetheless did not have complete control over the future of their island. Meetings and conferences were held on many occasions between Angaurese land owners and Americans, to discuss which further lands were to be exploited for phosphate

³⁰⁷Ibid.

³⁰⁸US Naval Military Government Unit, *Palau Islands - Monthly Report for January 1947*, p. 2.

³⁰⁹Ibid. In 1947-48 it was estimated that 400 Japanese nationals were employed on Angaur to work in the phosphate mine. See School of Naval Administration, p. 175.

³¹⁰US Military Government Unit, *Palau Islands - Quarterly Report of activities for April, May and June 1947*, p. 15. From 30 June 1947.

and which were to be left for growing food and what benefits the Angaurese were to receive from the continued mining.³¹¹

Some of the activities of the Angaurese were under tight control, especially the amount of contact they had with Japanese workers. The American policy on association between Palauans and Japanese was complete segregation. On a 1950 field trip, Lt. Stille discovered that "a Japanese doctor had been coming to the village dispensary three times a week to treat the natives". He reported his actions in this case.

Since it is the policy of CivAd Palau to keep all Japanese out of the native area and likewise keep the Palauans out of the Phosphate Mining Company camp area, the natives were informed that this practice would be discontinued...Since there is no longer a CIVADREP at Angaur, there is always the possibility of misunderstanding between the Japanese and Angaurese. It is also quite evident that the Japanese are making every effort to befriend the Angaurese by offering these services; whatever ulterior motive they might have, it is one which can be done without, and it is felt that strict segregation is the only solution.³¹²

The American administration's concern about the "ulterior motives" of the Japanese was probably exacerbated by the ease with which Palauans related to their former administrators. It is revealing that the Islanders of Angaur, who were the first to leave Japanese control and to come under American administration, were also the first to re-establish contacts with Japanese people. In 1950, six years after American occupation, most Angaurese still felt more comfortable relating to and communicating with Japanese people. Ngkeruker Salii recalls that out of

respect for the Americans...when we were sick or we wanted to go to school we would go to the Americans, but when we wanted to have leisure time, to communicate, we would go to those Japanese people because we understood the language and could talk.³¹³

³¹¹*Angaur Mining Conference October 1951* - Transcripts of proceedings and various background papers held on microfilm - Reels 402, 404, & 525. (Trust Territory Archives, Hamilton Library, University of Hawaii).

³¹²Civil Administration Unit, Palau District - *Report from Field Trip Officer to Civil Administrator, Palau District : Peleliu and Angaur field trip*, 6 July 1950. (Held at Hoover Institution).

³¹³Ngkeruker Salii.

Most Americans did not know that Angaurese visited the Japanese because they did it secretly: "we had to hide ourselves".³¹⁴

Temel Ngirchorachel, who moved from Ngermid to Angaur to work at the phosphate mine, felt that there was still some distance and animosity between Islanders and Japanese.

At the time the tables were turned because the Japanese knew that they had lost the war so they sort of kept cool and instead it was the Palauans who were giving them a hard time, instead of them giving us a hard time.³¹⁵

It is probable that he felt a stronger antipathy towards the Japanese because of where he was during the war. On Babeldaob, the actions of the Japanese soldiers were a major cause of suffering whereas for Angaurese it was the war itself and the battle for Angaur which brought about their hardships.

CivAd believed that the Japanese on Angaur were being particularly kind to the Palauans in order to make up for any previous harsh treatment and to re-establish friendly ties. The American feared this was also the motive of the few remaining Japanese holdouts in Palau.

Surrender, mop-up operations and repatriation did not remove all Japanese from the islands and a number of stragglers remained. They carried out raids on Palauan farms and occasionally attacked American troops. The biggest group of Japanese holdouts were on Peleliu. In March 1947, a small Marine patrol was attacked by a group of twelve Japanese throwing hand grenades. The renegade unit was led by a former Japanese naval officer and was so organized in its attack that a further group of 77 Marine enlisted men and three officers had to be sent from Hawaii and Guam to clear them out.³¹⁶ At that stage it was believed that "50 Japanese were estimated still at large in the northern Palaus" and the "location of their headquarters and their source of

³¹⁴Ibid.

³¹⁵Temel Ngirchorachel.

³¹⁶"Japanese Renegades Cower After Combat With Marines" in *Navy News*, Sunday 23 March 1947. p. 1. (Held at Hoover Institution)

ammunition [was] not known".³¹⁷ This was only the beginning of a month of marine patrolling as part of "Operation Capitulation", which aimed to force these remaining Japanese to surrender.³¹⁸ *Navy News* in Guam reported that the

The renegade Japanese reign of terror [was] designed to re-establish the prestige of hiding Japanese with the Caroline islands' natives...A Japanese lieutenant commander who has hidden for many months is reportedly directing approximately 30 Japanese who want to re-establish face with the natives.³¹⁹

This report suggested that

The recent increase in the Japanese population on Peleliu is due to cannily directed movements up from the rugged Babelt [Babeldaob] island a few miles to the north from which the Japanese commander is rumored to be sending more of the estimated 100 Japanese to rob Peleliu's ration dumps...³²⁰

When the last seven of the Japanese hold-outs were finally forced to surrender on 22 April, a total of 33 had given themselves up.³²¹

Throughout the navy period the administration reported sightings of thin and ragged Japanese stragglers, particularly on Peleliu.³²² During its last year in Palau, naval government attempted to track down one last soldier who was still in hiding on the island. Although elusive, he was not considered dangerous.³²³

As late as mid 1951, just before the navy was due to hand over the administration of the islands to the US Department of the Interior, its men and women were still trying to cope with problems caused by the war. Navy personnel were also finding that the

³¹⁷"Small Jap Patrol Attacks Marine Patrol on Peleliu" in *Navy News*, Friday, 21 March 1947. p. 1

³¹⁸"Last Jap Servicemen On Peleliu Surrender" in *Navy News*, Thursday 24 April 1947. p. 1.

³¹⁹"Japanese Renegades Cower After Combat With Marines" in *Navy News*, Sunday 23 March 1947. p. 1.

³²⁰*Ibid.*

³²¹*Ibid.*

³²²For summary of sightings see *Ltr from Civil Administrator, Palau District to High Commissioner of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands : Japanese Holdouts on Peleliu Island*, 1 March 1951. (RG 313, Box 6932) and *Information of Japanese seen on Peleliu Island, Koror*, 20 August 1951. (Microfilm Reel 573, Frame 152, Trust Territory Archives).

³²³*Ltr from Civil Administrator, Palau District to High Commissioner of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands : Japanese Holdouts on Peleliu Island*, 1 March 1951.

conflicts which had developed in Palau during peacetime were in many cases insurmountable. The administration was well aware that there were now two Palaus, one in which people were making connections with Americans and another where people were beginning to look back nostalgically to the Japanese period.³²⁴

The final civil administrator, Commander Curtis, saw the drawbacks of Americanizing Palauans and encouraging them to gravitate towards the district centre at Koror. He also thought he had the solution: to create a third Palau comprised of Americans living at Topside. One of his actions, in particular, reveals his desire to establish a segregated and protected colony of Americans and his aim to exercise strong police powers over Islanders to keep them from mixing with the American community.

In 1950, a young Palauan from Ngiwal was one of four offenders caught stealing petrol from the civil administration.³²⁵ Curtis reported that all the young men involved in the incident were under twenty and

were part of a group staying on Koror with no apparent vocation. The theft of gasoline was one of a series of thefts which by general opinion was attributed to the group of young men who had their headquarters at one or two taxi stands...These young men and some others are similar to the type that idle in pool rooms and other similar resorts in the States and have been a source of minor trouble in other ways.³²⁶

Curtis' solution to this "trouble" was to exile the offenders to their homes for a specified period.

Yoshihara was tried in the municipal court at Koror with the other three natives and all were sentenced to fifteen days in jail for theft of the gasoline...Upon completion of the jail sentence the four natives were sent to their original homes in other municipalities for a period of six months by order of the Chief of Police. The Chief of Police was directed to send the four to their homes by the Civil Administrator. Yoshihara was sent to Ngiual [sic], his home before coming to Koror.³²⁷

³²⁴See for example comments in *US Civil Administration Unit, Palau District - Quarterly Report 2-48 for January, February and March 1948*. p.21. and *US Civil Administration Unit, Palau District - Quarterly Report 1-49 for October, November and December 1949*. p. 20. (Held at Hoover Institution).

³²⁵Ltr from Civil Administrator to High Commissioner of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands via Chief Administrator of Field Headquarters, Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands - [Y] case - executive or administrative authority of Civil Administrator; restriction of, 20 June 1950. pp. 1-2. (RG 313, Box 6934).

³²⁶Ibid.

³²⁷Ibid. p. 2.

This order amounted to six months' further confinement.³²⁸ As a result of Curtis' strong action in this case, a high level policy discussion about the extent of police authority held by civil administrators was begun. This developed because Yoshihara appealed to the District Court to have his sentence overturned. Curtis was then advised by despatch from the Field Headquarters of the TTPI to cancel his order because it was illegal, contradicted the Trusteeship Agreement, which guaranteed freedom of movement and would "deprive Yoshihara of his liberty without due process of law", which was contrary to the Trust Territory Bill of Rights.³²⁹

Curtis wrote back to explain that his action did not amount to actual exile of the men, but was more like an expulsion back to their homes "in the same spirit that a magistrate, sheriff or town marshall in the States would order an undesirable out of town until reformed".³³⁰ He pointed out that this practice had been used effectively in the past to expel

certain young women to their homes for rehabilitation, they having been repeated V.D. contacts and frequent occupants of our dispensary. The young women had no visible means of support and had a bad effect on the community.³³¹

He stressed that, in his opinion, "Without the necessary police authority the Civil Administrator would be powerless to improve a situation of this nature". He believed he had only exercised what was "the highly essential, legitimate and proper executive or administrative authority of the Civil Administrator" and that "the use of police authority is a matter of common sense and good judgement".³³²

³²⁸Ibid.

³²⁹Message despatch from *FIELDTERPACIS* to *CIVAD PALAUS/MAIL*. (RG 313, Box 6934).

³³⁰Ltr from *Civil Administrator* to *High Commissioner of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands* via *Chief Administrator of Field Headquarters, Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands* - [Y] case - *executive or administrative authority of Civil Administrator; restriction of*, 20 June 1950. p. 2.

³³¹Ibid.

³³²Ibid.

This view was not shared by everyone in the higher echelons of naval government, although it was supported by some.³³³ The case was concluded by a reiteration of the binding rules of the Trusteeship agreement with regard to the civil rights of Island people and Curtis was again ordered to cancel his order. Civil Administrators were not to have "police power" and "unlawful imprisonment or orders by the Civil Administrator could subject them to prosecution in the civil courts".³³⁴

Despite this pronouncement, the issue was raised again in a discussion of new interim regulations in 1951.³³⁵ In a statement of the arguments against any new powers for CivAds, the Chief Justice felt that the aim of the Civil Administrator in the Palau Islands in requesting "sweeping powers" had been

primarily to assist in dealing with juvenile delinquency and control of venereal disease. The basic theory appears to be that the protection of American personnel against losses and annoyances caused by potential offenders and the danger of contracting venereal disease justifies overriding the rights of the indigenous inhabitants.³³⁶

William Vitarelli recalls that Curtis was a "rough sort of fellow" with the attitude that "might makes right".³³⁷ Not all navy personnel thought the same way, but in the later Forties and early Fifties, Americans in Palau instituted a degree of segregation between Topside and the rest of Koror and Palau.

The increased presence of navy wives was one reason for this. Useem sensed that the arrival of American women "made a tremendous difference". Some loved the island life and associated with Palauans, "buying Palauan things", but others wanted to create "a real American home - American food, American style, American clothes."³³⁸ His impression was that the

³³³See correspondence from Admiral Radford in various papers held in RG 313, Box 6932.

³³⁴Memorandum from 92 to 00 - *Executive or Administrative authority of the Civil Administrator, brief on*, 11 August 1950. (RG 313, Box 6930).

³³⁵Memorandum from Chief Justice to High Commissioner - *Proposed Interim Regulations on Orders Restricting Residence*, 31 March 1951. (RG 313, Box 6934).

³³⁶*Ibid.*

³³⁷William Vitarelli.

³³⁸John Useem.

American women with a few exceptions of very unusual women, didn't really reach out into it [Palauan culture]. They liked to see what it was like but they didn't get deeply penetrated as the men had to in the jobs they had.³³⁹

Some Palauans found the presence of these women disconcerting. Karmelong Mengur remembers that he was

more or less afraid of them. For the past time I only looked at their pictures in the papers. When the time came that I actually looked at them, I was ashamed of the way I looked because I was brown and they had white skin. Even the colour of their eyes was different. On weekends when the navys and their wives would go out to the Rock Islands...we would be shocked to look at them because they were wearing bathing suits and shorts and in Japanese times you would never see a woman's legs...The Americans would bare everything.³⁴⁰

Most Palauans had less contact with American women than with the men. Many do not recall seeing them. Useem feels that during this period navy officers who developed closer associations with Palauans and tried to understand their needs walked a finely balanced line in order to avoid being labelled "gone native".

It's alright to be friendly, to have relations...but when you begin becoming their spokesman, taking their interests and putting it first and mixing in with their style of life too deeply, getting involved with their women, getting involved with their things too much day after day, not going to a dance once or twice - then they said - "We see you over there all the time, we don't see you with our crowd". Then they began to say "What wrong with so and so - has he gotten to the point where maybe we ought to send him stateside?"³⁴¹

There were clear "outer boundaries" of association and "those few Americans who did go native were pushed out of the system".³⁴² Peter Hill recalls that the officer's club at Topside was the place where newcomers to Palau learned what was acceptable and what was not. It seemed to him that sharing anecdotes, "was an important way in which culture was transmitted and they told each other what it was

³³⁹Ibid.

³⁴⁰Karmelong Mengur.

³⁴¹John Useem.

³⁴²Ibid.

like".³⁴³ On his second trip to Palau in 1950, botanist Raymond Fosberg felt that many of the naval officers, enlisted men and their dependents had by then formed their own "closed community" at Topside.³⁴⁴

Having brought about the creation of two Palaus and set up a number of choices for the people of the island group, the navy administration then retreated. In doing so, they withdrew one of the opportunities offered to Palauans who wished to become part of American Palau. Social relations between Palauans and Americans outside of work were now strongly discouraged so making a connection through friendship or some form of intimate relationship was much more difficult. Therefore the primary way to be part of American Palau was through education and employment. Those who were unable to find such a place in the new system could only withdraw into the other Palau, the Palau which comprised most of Babeldaob. There Palauans had decided that the way to recapture the security of their previous life under Japanese administration was to return to Palauan traditional ways. The Japanese had brought economic freedom, but kept control by establishing tight limits and maintaining order. Under Americans there was economic opportunity, but seemingly no order.

Many Palauans believe that the biggest change that Americans brought was freedom, particularly the freedom to choose.³⁴⁵ They displayed a new way of life but told people to decide for themselves what to take and what to leave. Much of the time Palauans "didn't know what was right and what was wrong".³⁴⁶ Many were bewildered by this new world, on the other side of the looking glass, where the certainties of the past were constantly overturned. In spite of the many difficulties of

³⁴³Peter Hill.

³⁴⁴Raymond Fosberg: KRW Interview 15 June 1990. Daniel and Shirley Peacock who came to Palau in February 1953, during the administration of the Department of the Interior, recall that there was an isolation between Americans and Palauans. The former navy personnel and their wives, who had transferred to the Interior and stayed on in Palau, were particularly "club oriented" and drinking loyally at the club was "awfully important". Personnel would meet there regularly at 4:30 pm after work. Palauans were not allowed into the club and bar, except rarely when accompanied by an American, and they were not allowed to drink alcohol at all. Daniel & Shirley Peacock : KRW Interview 8 August 1990, Honolulu, Hawaii.

³⁴⁵For example Yano Kebekol Mariur, Mongami Kelmal, Obechou Delutaach, Ngkeruker Salii and numerous others.

³⁴⁶Karmelong Mengur.

understanding and communication, Palauans pushed on, started to make connections with Americans and tried to recreate order in their lives . But the Americans gradually withdrew some of the options they had previously offered. They started to introduce new rules. None of these however, were like those laid down by Palau's former rulers. There was nothing to tell Palauans outright what their lives were to be.

*

Like an Angel Gabriel the US Navy landed in Peleliu and Angaur in September 1944. For a long year there were two Palaus - one already American, one still Japanese. A year later at the surrender, the Angel stepped into the rest of Palau, uniting it again. As the messengers of the powerful America that had conquered Japan, navy personnel began to remake Palau in the American image, but given a new free will to choose, Palauans moved in two different directions. At Topside,

Betwixt these rocky pillars, Gabriel sat,
Chief of the angelic guards, awaiting night.³⁴⁷

Night came for the navy in June 1951, when "without serious difficulty" the administration of 6,839 Palauans was handed over to the Department of the Interior.³⁴⁸

Both Americans and Palauans had 'stood the test of naval government' in that they had managed to live through that time. But the Palau the navy created during its "interim" government and then left behind had become a place which would test Palauans further, offering them more freedom of choice in their future, but even less certainty.

³⁴⁷John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Book IV, Lines 549-550.

³⁴⁸*Civil Administration Unit, Palau District - Quarterly Report for the months of April, May and June 1951.* p. 1. (Held at Hoover Institution). Population figure taken from census material, Ibid. p. 9.

Conclusion

ONLY CONNECT...*

*E.M. Forster, *Howards End*. (Penguin Books, 1976), p. 3.

On 5 July 1990 John Useem became choked with emotion as he described the events of an unforgettable pitch black night 46 years before, when he was asked to act as executioner.¹ Useem's wife, Ruth, told me he still has nightmares about the experience.²

That November, in the late afternoon in a house in Koror, Mathias Akitaya spoke of what his parents must have suffered in trying to care for him during thirty terrifying days in the darkness of a cave. He wiped away tears as he thought of his own children, "I wish for them to see that".³ As I left he asked me for a copy of this thesis, a work written in English, that he will not be able to read.

One of the aims of this history has been to make connections. The historian can be a thread that links people, events and meaning into a lasting tapestry of a time past. In any writing the final product is a personal view, one version of events. Yet by using oral history the image can become closer to the reality as lived by some people.

Sometimes the work of anthropologists can create a distance between outsiders and Islanders, by focussing on the "Islanderness" of people of the Pacific and on the zero point of the "ethnographic present".⁴ In this work I have endeavoured to uncover connections between written records from the outside experience of war and reconstruction, and the personal memories of individuals on the inside. The focus has been on individual Palauans, not all Palauans, and on recreating the physical surroundings of the war and navy periods.

¹John Useem.

²Conversation with Ruth Hill Useem, 5 July 1990, East Lansing, Michigan.

³Mathias Akitaya.

⁴Greg Denning, "History 'in' the Pacific." in *The Contemporary Pacific : A Journal of Island Affairs*, Volume 1, No. 1, Spring 1989, p. 136.

My interviews with people of various ages and experiences led me to see that the impact of these events was personal and varied. Yet I also discovered many links between people's responses, based on a range of inside and outside factors. On the inside, people who were closer to the Japanese knew more about the war, became more involved in preparations, helped maintain order during the long year. Others' actions were based purely on the human instinct for survival. Parents with responsibility for children thought about survival in a different way from teenage boys, who were sometimes caught up in the excitement of seeing planes wheeling in the air and enemy pilots floating down in parachutes. For the young men who trained with the Japanese and learned the spirit of a soldier, the Japanese were strong and fearless. For women, who carried loads of supplies over long distances, fearing bullets raining down from above, or who frantically collected food from their own gardens in the dark, watched over by soldiers with guns, the war was harsh and the Japanese cruel.

People's war experiences were connected by outside factors too. The planes made war more dangerous for people who lived near the Airai airstrip or took shelter next to the Japanese military headquarters at Ngatpang. They took the lives of people who fished or went out into the open to garden or labour for the Japanese. After the war, the American choice to establish their headquarters at Ngermid on Koror influenced how much contact different people were to have with the new foreigners. The behaviour and actions of the Americans set out the ways in which men or women could make links with these new rulers and determined the choices Palauans could make about their future.

The historian can piece together these various sets of responses and highlight individual variations. The war was both the same and different for twelve year old Felix Yaoch and fourteen year old Minoru Ueki, because of their particular backgrounds. Their movements, their problems, their relationships during the long year were their own, but some of their reactions as young boys were the same. For both the war meant excitement combined with loss and separation. Peace brought them together for the first time and they both chose to make a way in the new order through education.

Sister Elene loved the Japanese "because we grow with them and they're very ordered", but on Angaur she had to leave them behind, trust in God, and seek out safety with the Americans.⁵ On Babeldaob, a woman of similar age, cramped in a cave feeding three babies and hugging them to her body to keep them warm "despised" the Japanese. "Many Palauans died because of the war," she says, "It was the fault of the Japanese".⁶

In peacetime Jonathon Emul felt sad for the Japanese. He did not want them to go - "I wanted them to stay...but they had to leave right away". It took him a long time "to forget this feeling of friendship".⁷ Yet he made his way in the American world, taking up opportunities, to learn English, become a teacher and move into politics. Tutii Ngirutoi remembers the cruelty of the Japanese people and how he felt respected as a real policeman under the Americans.⁸

Mengesebuuch Yalap enjoyed the freedom of being able to talk Palauan or English in the American classroom. Previously the Japanese had slapped her fingers when she spoke her own language instead of Japanese.⁹ Ascension Ngelmas looks back nostalgically at the ordered life under the Japanese, the people with "one will" instead of their "own will".¹⁰ Obechou Delutaach, forced away from her home in Peleliu, returned to see it an empty white field. She did not know what to think of these new people who had won the war. She sensed freedom, but for her it also meant ignorance.¹¹

These Palauans and others survived the war and gradually made their way into peace in different ways and with varied feelings about the journey. One of the keys to understanding the responses of these Palauans to the transition from war to peace and

⁵Sister Elene Ebud.

⁶Woman, Ngermid.

⁷Jonathon Emul.

⁸Tutii Ngirutoi.

⁹Mengesebuuch Yalap.

¹⁰Ascension Ngelmas.

¹¹Obechou Delutaach.

from Japanese to American administration is what I see as "relativity": the idea that people's choices are tied to past experience, to who they are, where they are, and what they have done. Particularly in Palau, an island group which has undergone numerous changes of administration¹², people's reactions are closely allied to past experience. Taking a chronological view it can be seen that Palauans developed certain expectations under Japanese administration and these influenced the attitudes with which they went into the war. People then began to respond in different ways as a result of the changing circumstances of the war in the south and on Babeldaob, and in response to the physical and psychological trauma caused by war. Reactions were also relative to age and gender.

Contact with Americans came in three phases. During the war the Americans were the enemy, but they were also part of the unknown and people responded negatively or positively to them based on their own circumstances during the war. In the second phase, the "honeymoon" period immediately after the war, Palauans' responses to American generosity were relative to the privations they had just experienced. The violence of the break from the past and the way in which Americans entered Palau as "angels", bringing food and safety and re-establishing life, influenced the way individuals accepted and adapted to the new order. Reactions to the third phase of American seclusion at Topside in some ways stemmed from the thwarting of expectations raised in those first days of American occupation.

The 43 Palauans interviewed for this work responded in a number of ways to similar circumstances. Their responses were, and are, related to their individual histories. The experiences of these 43 Palauans can offer insights into the possible experiences of other Palauans. By taking an historical approach and by seeking out connections we can begin to see how individual movements, responses and choices brought about change on a larger scale.

Broadly, reactions to the transition from Japanese to American administration divided into two conflicting choices about Palau's future relationship with this new

¹²From Spanish to German to Japanese to American administration.

outside power. Friction between the "two Palaus"¹³, between opposing views and choices, has caused many problems in Palau's recent past, and divisions still persist today.¹⁴ The war and its aftermath are intricately connected. Strands of the choices made during the war and the navy period can be traced through to the present day.

Much of the history of Palau during and after the war is contained within the individual histories of Palauans. Older Palauans must find a place to record their stories for the benefit of their children and grandchildren, and for the education of the outside world. If one mentions Peleliu in America or Australia, people might remember the terrible bloodshed of the battle for that island. They think of the huge number of American lives lost in what was supposed to be a "quickie".¹⁵ No outsider thinks of Obechou returning to a wasteland, trying to locate her home. People beyond Palau do not link Peleliu to a group of islands, do not know of Palauan lives that were lost, or how the land was altered by the violence of a war that had little to do with its inhabitants. By making these connections a more complete history of Palau at war can be shared by all.

Threads of history brought John Useem back to a day 46 years ago, as they also brought Mathias Akitaya. They made a connection between a child on an island at war and a man who was sent there to care for him and who would gradually change his world. Both are still trying to make sense of their pasts. This work, by unfolding their shared history, hopes to offer them, and others, a few more answers.

¹³As discussed in Chapter Six.

¹⁴Much of the conflict has been and is over whether or not to accept the American Compact of Free Association and all its related elements.

¹⁵First Marine Division Commander, Major General William H. Rupertus "was very, very optimistic" about the Peleliu campaign and how fast he believed his troops could capture the island. He wrongly predicted that the operation would be "a quickie". As quoted by Spector, p. 420.

APPENDIX A PALAUANS AT WAR OVERSEAS

A small group of Palauan men spent the war outside Palau, working for the Japanese army overseas. This appendix provides a brief description of their recruitment and then concentrates on the experiences of two men who served in New Guinea.¹

Higuchi discusses the recruitment of the *Chosatai* (Palau Survey Group) and the *Teishintai* (Palauan Voluntary Group). These two groups of Palauan men were selected and employed by the Japanese company *Nantaku* in early and mid 1943 to serve in survey groups in New Guinea.² *Nantaku* worked under the auspices of the Japanese military, so all "employees participated directly in military activities".³ The Palauan men who were recruited first worked as part of a Japanese team surveying natural resources, but as the war progressed some remained in New Guinea and transferred to work as carriers or labourers for the army or navy.⁴ Yano Kebekol Mariur recalls that he and other Palauans were "assigned to the 104 Construction Group⁵ and were called the Palau *Seinentai* (Palauan Youngmen's Group)".⁶ Higuchi notes that today the men who served with the Japanese in New Guinea "proudly tell of their participation and brave experiences".⁷

While in Palau I interviewed two men who served in New Guinea. They have proud but also painful memories of their war. Yano Mariur was stationed, with a number of other Palauans, at Manokwari on the north-west tip of New Guinea. The main task of his company was unloading ships, day and night, and delivering

¹The experiences of these two men do not depict those of all Palauans who served overseas with the Japanese. A complete study of Palauan war service is an area for much further research.

²Higuchi, "Micronesians and the Pacific War: The Palauans" in Ballendorf, Shuster and Higuchi, pp. 69-74. Higuchi gives a figure of 60 men selected for the first group and no figure for the second.

³Ibid. p. 72.

⁴Ibid. p. 73.

⁵Peattie refers to this *teishintai* group as the 104th Construction Detachment. See Peattie, p. 301.

⁶Higuchi, "Micronesians and the Pacific War: The Palauans" in Ballendorf, Shuster and Higuchi, p. 73.

⁷Ibid.

ammunition wherever it was needed. Allied bombing was regular, so this was dangerous work. Yano says that the Japanese used Palauans "because they got to know that Palauans worked quickly" and could unload fast between periods bombing.⁸ The bombing was very frightening.

You just shut your eyes and you shut your ears and you squat down and you think "It's coming. It's coming. You wait for them everyday to be dropped."⁹

In May 1944 Yano narrowly escaped death unloading a ship which was bombed at the end of his shift. It exploded, killing many soldiers. After the May attack there was more bombing at night and sleep was disrupted, "we don't sleep because we don't know when they'll come to drop bombs".¹⁰ As the war became more harsh Yano went into the jungle with the Japanese where, as one of a group of 14 Palauans, he farmed to provide food for the soldiers. Yano felt complete commitment to the Japanese cause. "We were Japanese at the time. We were one. We had to fight when they fought. We had to go for it, go for broke for the Japanese".¹¹

A few months before the war ended Yano "became a soldier". He was trained to lift and carry shells and ammunition to the guns. He also helped to dig out two "big caves that could fit two hundred people in each cave". He remembers when one of these caves was bombed.

We had to dig the bodies out...those who were in the front of the cave got bombed out and they died and those who were further back died of the poison gas - some of them died and some of them went crazy. We had to dig the bodies out to get into those ones who were still inside.¹²

Sickness and hunger killed many of the soldiers and Yano believes the reason why many Japanese survived was because the Palauans knew how to hunt and fish to

⁸Yano Kebekol Mariur (M 1926): KRW Interview 21 November 1990, SCC, Koror, Palau.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Ibid.

provide food for them. In carrying out their duties some of the Palauans in the group died. Yano can "never forget six of my companions who are buried over there. They died and were buried over there".¹³

Yano was shocked to learn that the war was over. He thought the Japanese "were going to win the war but instead we lost". After the surrender some of the Palauans were forced to stay in New Guinea to help with reconstruction. They were housed in a fenced compound in Manokwari. Not until mid 1946 was there transport to take them home to Palau.¹⁴ Yano recalls his return:

When the ship first went to Angaur I argued with the Captain that this is not Palau, you know, you have to check it out again. But the Captain said "This is Palau"...There were no trees. On my way to Papua we had stopped by at Angaur because of a storm and it was green, there were trees. But on my way back there was nothing and that is why I told the Captain "This is not Palau. You are wrong".¹⁵

Karmelong Mengur was initially recruited to work as a truck driver for the military. At Manokwari in New Guinea he also trained day and night, running everywhere, beaten by the soldiers if he fell. He found the harsh training almost "unbearable", but the Japanese wanted to be sure the Palauans would be ready to fight when the time came.¹⁶ Karmelong's job, once the fighting began, was "hauling shells. There would be those trenches in the ground where they put the guns. We would take the shells inside".¹⁷

Food was scarce. Karmelong recalls that they were not allowed to build their own fire to cook their own food. All the soldiers and the Palauans had to share from one pot heated over one fire. Supply lines had been cut and there were no canned rations, so Palauans would go out to fish at night to provide food for the soldiers.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Peattie, p. 301. The Japanese made a film about the 104th Construction Detachment after the war called *Minami no shima ame ga furu* [It rains in the southern islands]. See Peattie, p. 347n.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Karmelong Rechululk Mengur (M 1918) : KRW Interview 27 October 1990, Ngermid, Koror, Palau.

¹⁷Ibid.

Some of his group of 36 Palauans left New Guinea earlier and travelled by ship to other places¹⁸, but Karmelong and 13 others stayed.¹⁹

Like Yano, Karmelong felt "no difference" between himself and the Japanese. "I and the Japanese were one. We were one people".²⁰ Karmelong did not want to fight but "it was a responsibility I had to take". He was willing to die for the Japanese, "I was trying. I was supposed to die during the war."²¹ Bombing was constant and Karmelong's enduring memory of the war is of never being able to sleep because of the noise and the constant work.

The only thing that I wished for during the whole of the war was I wished that if I could only have just four minutes to close my eyes, to sleep, to shut my eyes...because there was no days and nights, we had to work...That's the only thing that I can never forget, the moment you wish to sleep.²²

For Karmelong the end of the war was not the end of suffering. Like Yano, he remained in New Guinea to help clear debris and construct houses and quonsets. He remembers being forced also "to make our own fence for us to be inside". The New Guinean people were posted to guard the Palauans whenever they worked, pointing guns at their backs.

The New Guineans were like the foremen. They were in charge of us. To me that was even harder than the war...because we were helpless in that case...we were not supposed to fight for them or against them but still they were there standing there pointing guns at us, telling us what to do every second. Even if we were two seconds late or anything, they would kick us in the back and they would beat us with the gun, but I was not supposed to do anything, I would just sit there. I would cry my heart out, but I wouldn't dare show it. It was the frustration.²³

¹⁸See Ubal Tellei, "Palauans and the Japanese Military Experience" in White (ed.), *Remembering the Pacific War*. pp. 157-160. While some Palauans remained in New Guinea, others like Ubal Tellei left New Guinea by ship and travelled to Sulawesi, Borneo, Singapore and eventually Japan and Taiwan.

¹⁹This suggests Karmelong was in the same group as Yano - 14 men in all. He also spoke of the six Palauans men who died in New Guinea.

²⁰Karmelong Mengur.

²¹Ibid.

²²Ibid.

²³Ibid.

When the men learned they were to return home, they "couldn't sleep at nights" for joy. However, even at home, Karmelong recalls being treated like the enemy by the Americans. The men went first to Angaur and then to Peleliu.

It was very hard for us when we first went to Peleliu because we had Japanese uniforms and they treated us as Japanese soldiers. So they were harsh with us. Even though we were Palauans we had to go through papers and one step at a time.²⁴

After two and a half months Karmelong finally reached Koror where he was immediately placed in jail. "It was because they were afraid we still had Japanese attitudes in our minds and they were afraid we were going to do something to the Americans". It was only through chief Aibedul's intervention that the men were released.

We were all very happy to go back and see our parents after we came out. But we had papers, like a promissory note, for each of us to get about a thousand dollars [for their post war work for the Allies in New Guinea]...but the Americans tore the notes up.²⁵

To this day these Palauan men are seeking compensation from the Japanese Government for their war service overseas and trying to find a way to bring the remains of their comrades back to Palau. As Karmelong pointed out, it should be possible because "some Japanese have come to Palau to get the bones of their soldiers to bring them back to Japan".²⁶ Yano Mariur has visited Japan since the war to try and seek a way to do the same for the six Palauans who went to war overseas and never returned. His strongest memory of the war is of the loss of these friends and he is "still trying to find a way for them to come home".²⁷

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Yano Kebekol Mariur.

APPENDIX B

NUMBER OF SORTIES PER LOCATION PER MONTH - Bombing & Strafing Runs (compiled from War Diary MAG 11).

Month	Babeldaob Day	Koror Malakal Arakabesang Ngargol	Babeldaob Koror Night	Ngatpang	Babeldaob Strip at Airai	Ngardmau
October 1944	603	-	-	-	67	58
November	581	63	355	-	15	-
December	946	2	-	44	20	34
January 1945	1105	63	24	63	8	10
February	1205	30	185	36	16	3
March	1141	175	185	24	28	-
April	949	25	138	-	-	-
May	254	8	55	-	-	-
June	252	12	164	-	-	-
July	588	82	99	-	-	-
August	93	21	41	-	-	12

Month	Mizuho-mura	Asahi-mura	Central Babeldaob	Melekeok	Outer Islands Rock Islands	Psychological Warfare Leaflets
October 1944	-	-	-	-	-	-
November	18	-	-	5	-	-
December	18	14	16	-	10	-
January 1945	-	12	-	-	32	-
February	-	-	-	-	78	-
March	-	-	-	-	4	-
April	-	-	-	-	16	-
May	-	-	-	-	429	8
June	-	-	-	-	406	8
July	-	-	-	-	16	6
August	-	-	-	-	8	1

* These figures *do not include* daily Combat Air Patrol (12 sorties every day/approx. 360 per month) and Anti-Submarine Patrol (15 sorties per day/approx. 450 per month).

** The absence of a figure means that no sorties were made *specifically* over that area, that month. Day and night sorties over the whole of Babeldaob, however, meant that most areas were still covered frequently.

APPENDIX C
NUMBERS OF OFFICERS & ENLISTED MEN MG/CA UNIT, PALAU.
 (from available MG/CA Reports)

MONTH	OFFICERS	ENLISTED MEN	COMMANDING OFFICER
1945			
November	21	121	A.J. Byrholdt
December	N/A	N/A	
1946			
January	N/A	N/A	
February	N/A	N/A	
March	11	64	
April	8	29	
May	6	21	C.D. Anderson
June	3	20	
July	3	40	
August	3	43	
September	9	43	First SONA officers arrive
October	18	38	W.C. Ball
November	19	38	
December	18	42	
1947			
January	16	39	
February	16	42	
March	13	37	
As of July	19	43	
As of October	21	43	C.M. Hardison
1948			
As of January	16	43	
As of April	16	20	
As of July	16	21	
As of October	19	22	
1949			
As of January	17	25	
From April - No figures listed			A.D. Curtis - through to 1 July 1951

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As some names will be unusual to non-Palauan readers, women and men have been identified in references with the letters W and M respectively. Year of birth is also listed and the date and location of the interview are given. People who wished to remain anonymous are listed as Man or Woman. Although people were interviewed primarily in the Koror area, they came from many different districts. Most people at the Senior Citizens' Center were temporary visitors to Koror or had moved to Koror from other districts. People who were originally from the following districts were interviewed - Angaur, Peleliu, Arakabesang, Koror, Airai, Aimeliik, Ngchesar, Melekeok, Ngaraard, Ngarchelong and Kayangel. As the war and Japanese orders forced people into different areas to take refuge or work, experiences in most districts were covered in the interviews.

The following abbreviations are used:

SCC = Obis Ma Bai Rar Mechliodel : State Agency on Aging & Senior Citizens' Center in Koror, Palau.

E = Interview conducted in English.

CN = Camella Ngirausui interpreter.

SN/MG = Susan Ngaum and Maura Gordon interpreters.

AR = Augusta Ramarui interpreter.

RS = Rusk Saburo interpreter.

ANON = Interpreter who wished to remain anonymous.

Augusta Ramarui (W 1923) : 17 October 1990, SCC, Koror. E

Melii Kemaem (W 1929) : 17 October 1990, SCC. AR

Direou Orrukei (W 1925) : 19 October 1990, Koror. SN/MG

Man (1921) : 22 October, SCC. ANON

Mongami Kelmal (M 1926) : 23 October 1990, SCC. CN

Woman (1922) : 23 October 1990, Ngermid, Koror. CN

Benged Sechewas (W 1916) : 24 October 1990, Ngermid. CN

Man (1919) : 24 October 1990, Ngermid, Koror.

Skasuk Skang (W 1914) : 25 October 1990, SCC. CN

Mereb Eruang (M 1914) : 25 October 1990, Ngermid. CN

Tutii Ngirutoi (M 1919) : 26 October 1990, SCC. CN

Dr. Anthony Polloi (M 1936) : 26 October 1990, MacDonald Hospital, Koror. E

Rose Adelbai (W 1921) : 26 October 1990, Ngermid. CN

Karmelong Rechululk Mengur (M 1918) : 27 October 1990, Ngermid. CN

Temel Ngirchorachel (M 1928) : 27 October 1990, Ngermid. CN

Tibedaki Olblai (W 1917) : 29-30 October 1990, SCC. CN

Jonathon Emul (M 1927) : 29 October 1990, Idid, Koror. E

Alfonso Oiterong (M 1924) : 30 October 1990, Palau National Development Bank, Koror. E
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Delirang (W 1900) : 28 November 1990, SCC. CN
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Henry (Hank) Worswick : 24 November 1990, Ngerchemai, Koror. (Motor Machinist Mate, USN and then discharged and stayed. On Angaur and Palau 1944-present day).

B. In the USA, (chronological list)

Dr. Raymond Fosberg : 15 June 1990, Smithsonian Institution National Museum of Natural History, Washington DC. (Botanist with United States Commercial Company (USCC) Survey project. In Palau 1946 & 1950).

Professor John Useem : 5-7 July 1990, East Lansing, Michigan. (Military Government Officer on Angaur and anthropologist with USCC Survey and Co-ordinated Investigation of Micronesian Anthropology (CIMA) project. In Palau 1944, 1946 & 1948).

Peter Hill : 10 July 1990, Glouster, Ohio. (Scientist with Pacific War Memorial project. In Palau 1948-1950).

Pastor Wilhelm Fey : 21 July 1990, Canyonville, Oregon. (Missionary with German Liebenzell Mission. In Palau from 1933-1955).

Robert Owen and Hera Owen : 24 July 1990, Seattle, Washington. (Robert Owen was an Entomologist employed by US Navy. In Palau 1950-1951).

Dr. William Vitarelli and Henrietta Vitarelli : 4 August 1990, Maui, Hawaii. (William Vitarelli was an Educational Administrator employed by US Navy. In Palau 1949-1951)

Daniel Peacock and Shirley Peacock : 8 August 1990, Honolulu, Hawaii. (Daniel Peacock was involved in Education in Palau and Shirley Peacock worked in the administration 1953-1958).

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3. Conversations and correspondence with the following people during and after my stay in Palau also provided additional information.

Camella Ngirausui
 Maura Gordon
 Julie Tellei

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