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U.S. Presence on Kwajalein Isle Gives Rise to 'Social Revolution'

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Special to The New York Times

EBEYE, Marshall Islands — sanitary facilities, water and electricity. American antimissile exercise forces in the Marshall Islands have brought with them the trappings of big-city slums, as well as modern electronic luxuries, to the Micronesian residents of this overcrowded island in the strategic, closely guarded Kwajalein atoll.

The result has been what Dr. William V. Vitarelli, of New York, calls a "stunning social revolution" among the Marshall Island people.

Dr. Vitarelli is the top representative on Ebeye of the government of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands, of which the Marshalls are a part.

Kwajalein, captured from the Japanese in 1944 and included in the United Nations Trust Territory area awarded to United States custody after the war, is where missiles are sent up to shoot down other missiles that have been fired more than 4,000 miles over the Pacific from Vandenberg Air Force Base in California.

Marshallese Learn Quickly

"It is astonishing how quickly the Marshallese learned to want such twentieth-century appliances as electric refrigerators, automatic toasters and tape recorders," Dr. Vitarelli told a visitor. "And they want them right now," he added.

The Kwajalein Project, where 600 to 700 Micronesians are employed, has become "a huge vocational school" for the Marshall Islanders, Dr. Vitarelli said, developing "a pool of skills" hitherto unknown to the 18,000 people of these remote, sun-drenched atolls.

The less inspiring side of the "social revolution" shown by Dr. Vitarelli in a tour of Ebeye is the overcrowding caused by the lure of high wages paid by the American contractors on Kwajalein.

Workers receive the United States minimum of \$1.40 an hour, compared with the minimum of 30 cents an hour in the rest of the Trust Territory.

Result Is Crowding

Attracted by such relative affluence, about 4,500 Marshallese are concentrated on Ebeye in space that, according to official estimates, could accommodate only 2,700 persons "decently," Dr. Vitarelli asserted.

The result has been the growth of a "skilled community of makeshift tin hovel" described by some authorities as "paradise in paradise."

The United States Army has recently completed, for turning over to the Trust Territory government, a housing project consisting of 318 apartments with

sanitary facilities, water and electricity. Nevertheless, Dr. Vitarelli estimated, at least 1,000 Micronesians on Ebeye, many of whom are unemployed, remain homeless and sleep on the sand.

Against the attraction of American wages, a government effort — "Operation Exodus" — to get the unemployed to return to the islands where they came from has been a failure, Dr. Vitarelli said.

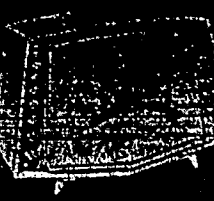
'Visitors' Stay on

A government order closing Ebeye to all but "temporary visitors" hasn't worked either, Dr. Vitarelli said. The "visitors" simply stay.

When an American girl on Kwajalein developed polio and a Marshallese woman contracted the infection from her and took it to Ebeye, the disease gained such headway on the overcrowded island that it threatened to spread throughout the Trust Territory with Marshallese travelers.

The effects are seen in crippled children being treated by the polio rehabilitation center at Majuro, the administrative center of the Marshall Islands.

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