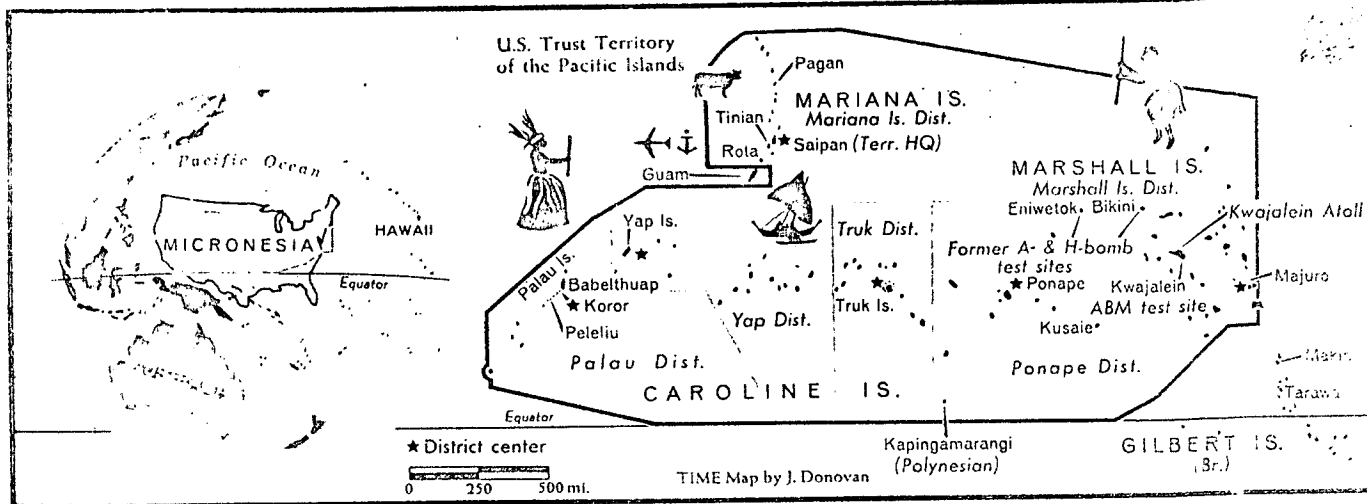


M. J. ...



REMEMBERING AN ADOPTED COUSIN

The endless ocean. The infinite specks of coral we call islands. Coconut palms nodding gracefully toward the ocean. Reefs upon which waves broke into spray, and inner lagoons, lovely beyond description.

PHYSICALLY, the sprawling South Pacific archipelagoes of Micronesia almost live up to the lotusland evoked by James Michener. But paradise has problems. The population of about 100,000—cut by 50% in the last century by war, emigration and disease—inhabits fewer than 100 of the 2,141 Marshall, Mariana and Caroline islands. And these in turn comprise only 700 sq. mi. of land in 3,000,000 sq. mi. of sea, an area nearly as large as the continental U.S. Distances are so great, and the people so scattered, that not even the ubiquitous and potentially valuable coconuts can be economically marketed: those on sale this month in Saipan, the administrative center, came from the Virgin Islands in the far-off Caribbean. A primitive economy, inadequate schools and social services and almost total unawareness by Americans that the U.S. bears any responsibility for the islands have combined to make Micronesians a sorely neglected folk.

Like the Raj. Before World War II, Micronesia's myriad atolls and volcanic islets were ruled by Japan under a League of Nations mandate and transformed into a honeycomb of airstrips and naval bases. The islands' agriculture and fisheries were also subsidized to help feed Japan. In 1947, the U.N. handed Micronesia over to the U.S. under a trusteeship arrangement that has turned out to be little more than occasionally benevolent colonialism. Education and health services have been improved somewhat, but Japanese-built roads are now so full of potholes that experienced travelers in cars suffer from a landlocked version of *mal de mer*, while the blessings of sewers and electricity are generally limited to districts where Americans dwell. The plush, U.S.-

inhabited Capitol Hill section on the island of Saipan resembles a British compound in India in the day of the Raj. Micronesian schoolteachers sometimes are paid only one-fifth as much as their American counterparts for the same work in island schools, and U.S. secretaries often get higher salaries than their Micronesian supervisors.

Now there are signs that the U.S. is moving to right these and other inequities. If Congress approves, U.S. aid in the fiscal year beginning July will rise 38%, to \$41.6 million. Last week U.S. Interior Secretary Walter Hickel named an islander as No. 2 man in the trust territory's administration, the first time a native has achieved this status. He is Peter T. Coleman, 49, the first Samoan ever to receive a law degree. A former Governor of Samoa and a district administrator in Micronesia since 1961, Coleman has steadfastly refused to live on Saipan's Capitol Hill. The son of an American sailor and a Samoan mother prefers a modest house in a native community.

Invitation to Moscow. Coleman's appointment followed a five-day visit by Hickel to his far-flung fief. His trip to Saipan was to counter rising unrest and consult Micronesian leaders about the shape of things to come. Lyndon Johnson promised that the U.S. would hold a plebiscite by 1972. Micronesians will have three choices: to continue the present arrangement, achieve complete independence or retain an association with the U.S., with greater responsibility for their own affairs. That Micronesians are uncertain of their future course was made clear recently when the Marianas district legislature, not knowing where to seek assistance, passed separate resolutions inviting aid from the Soviet Union and simultaneously asking Washington for a return of U.S. military bases, which had proved an unwonted windfall for the islands' economies during World War II.

Whatever happens, there is little chance that the islands can become self-

supporting on a purely civilian economy. If the U.S. is forced to close bases on Okinawa to meet growing Japanese objections, senior U.S. officers are seriously considering replacement of the Okinawa facilities with installations on Saipan and Tinian in the Marianas, and Babelthuap in the Palau Islands. Micronesians view the return of military facilities ambivalently: they would bring sorely needed jobs and money, but they would destroy much of the islands' remaining natural beauty and inevitably intrude upon Micronesian culture. Also, as in Guam, a U.S. possession, installations are usually set up on precious arable land because it is flat. Another boost may come from tourism. Japanese already make regular pilgrimages to the graves of their war dead, and Continental Airlines—the only line to serve the trust territories—has agreed to build six first-class hotels in Micronesia over the next three years.

Passports and Tariffs. Secretary Hickel's visit signaled a change in U.S. attitudes from the postwar days, when Micronesians were summarily unboxed from Bikini, Eniwetok and Kwajalein, so that their atolls could be used for nuclear and rocket testing. To a crowd gathered in the open courtyard of Saipan's Mount Carmel School—a roof blown off by last year's Typhoon Iear—Hickel announced: "For years you have had little voice in your government. This is wrong."

What will most likely result from the plebiscite is some form of free association of Micronesia with the U.S., somewhat akin to the commonwealth status of Puerto Rico. Even before that, the U.S. may ease two Indians by dropping requirements that Micronesians obtain passports in order to visit the U.S. and abandoning tariff barriers that treat Micronesia like a foreign country. "If it's good only for us, it's no good," Hickel told Micronesia's legislative leaders. "If it's good only for you, it's no good. It's got to be good for both of us." The islands, after all, are an adopted part of the American family, a status into which they were drafted by Washington.