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# Should U.S. get out of the Pacific?

By A. GROVE DAY

Just a few months ago we observed the 450th anniversary of the arrival, on the Micronesian island of Guam, of a shipload of Europeans led by Ferdinand Magellan. The crew of the Vittoria then went on to explore the Philippine group, and finally returned to Spain.

This first contact between Pacific people and those from the Western world thus

Americans seem to feel that America has no right to be in this biggest of oceans, and that we should pull up stakes and retreat to the cliffs of California.

Once more we must turn to the past in order to understand the present and try to divine the future. The 21st Century will be the century of the Pacific Community. Americans should not forget that they have been pioneers in the ocean that the Jet Age has made a highway to Asia.

Pacific adventure is far from a new experience for Americans. The Boston Tea Party dramatized a yearning for untaxed goods from the Orient, and the first American vessel to reach China sailed from New York in 1784. Before 1800, more than 200 trading ships cleared for Canton. Most of them rounded Cape Horn and crossed the Pacific.

THE NEW ENGLAND ship Columbia sailed around the world in 1789 and 1790. Americans were trading in the Hawaiian Islands and the Marquesas — a Micronesian group — in the 1790s. Four years after the settlement of the convict colony at Sydney, Australia, in 1788, the ship Philadelphia arrived there to sell the people tobacco, pitch, tar, salt beef, gin, and rum.

The discovery that pelts of the sea otter taken by Cook on the northwest coast of America were valued highly in China brought many Yankee and British ships into the Pacific fur trade. Hawaii, a handy way station, lured many a deserter to settle in Kamehameha's kingdom. The majority of the early foreign settlers there were American.

When the sea-otter fishery — which soon became an American monopoly — dwindled, the quest for fur seals expanded. Captain Edmund Fanning of New York, forerunner in the sealing trade, one day in 1792 sighted on the Juan Fernandez islands, old haunt of pirates, three or four hundred thousand seals. Before 1807, no less than three and a half million skins were shipped from this region to China.

Yankee seal hunters were so active in the strait north of Tasmania that the governor of Australia in 1804 wrote to London to protest against this invasion of British waters in the Southern Ocean.

THE GREAT PACIFIC whaling trade began in 1789, and for half a century was a

## insight

This is another in The Advertiser "Insight" series, in which members of the faculty and staff of the University of Hawaii and the East-West Center discuss important matters of the day.



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happened more than four and a half centuries ago. Yet many otherwise smart folks somehow feel that Westerners encountered the Pacific islanders only recently, and that it might be better if we "left them alone."

Naturally, this attitude is far less common in Hawaii than in other states.

AMERICANS SAILED with Captain James Cook before the United States became a nation, and Americans have voyaged the farthest reaches of the Pacific for almost two centuries. Yet, again, many

prime American industry. The first American-owned vessel to strike a leviathan in this ocean is said to have been the Beaver, which sailed from Nantucket in 1791. By the middle of the 19th Century, 680 vessels were listed in the American whaling fleet — all but 40 of them cruising the Pacific.

Americans eagerly sought other economic boons in Oceania. The town of Salem, Mass., held almost a monopoly of the importing of pepper from Sumatra. The pioneer in this venture returned home in 1799.

The trade in sandalwood between Hawaii and China dates back to 1789, and after 1815 became the main source of wealth for the chiefs, as well as the origin of the kingdom's national debt. Again, Americans held a virtual monopoly of this trade, and were also active in seeking the fragrant wood in the Marquesas and Fiji.

The reefs of Fiji abounded in a type of sea cucumber called beche-de-mer or trepang. The flesh, when properly smoked, was a delicacy bringing high prices in China. One American sold in China a load of beche-de-mer at a profit of 750 per cent! On this same trip he also collected two and a half tons of sandalwood, which brought him almost the same amount back in Salem. Along with tortoise shell and birds' nests (for soup), pearls and mother-of-pearl shell were also part of the American trade in the South Seas.

FIVE VESSELS of the United States Exploring Expedition between 1839 and 1842 crisscrossed the Pacific and explored all the main groups. The United States in 1846, with the signing of the treaty limiting the boundary of the Oregon Territory, officially became a Pacific power. The discovery of gold in California ushered in the era of Cape Horn clippers to the West Coast and the Orient. Our nation embarked in 1867 on overseas expansion when Midway was annexed — Midway, an island in the North Pacific.

Americans discovered scores of Pacific islands, and many still lie under the American flag between the state of Alaska (purchased from Russia in 1867) and American Samoa, well below the Equator.

When Commodore Matthew C. Perry in 1853 obtained promises from the Japanese government to open more ports for free trade with the rest of the world, America began a thriving commerce with Asia.

FROM THAT DATE, the United States was clearly the nation with the greatest stake in preserving peace not only in Oceania, but among all the many leading countries bordering the Pacific. The assumption of responsibility for the Philippines in 1898, and for the 3 million square miles of the United States Trust Territory in 1947, underlined America's commitment. Yet, in 1972, many Americans can still be found who say that Americans should "get out of the Pacific!"