

1/16/73

# Pacific Sunday News

ROBERT E. UDICK Publisher  
JOSEPH C. MURPHY Editor  
JIM EGGENSPERGER Acting Sunday Editor

PUBLISHED ON GUAM, WHERE AMERICA'S DAY BEGINS  
Sunday at Agana, Territory of Guam, U.S.A.  
P.O. Box DN-Agana, Guam 96910  
PHONE: 777-9711

Entered as Second Class Matter at the Post Office, Guam  
Under Act of Congress March 3, 1879  
Published by Guam Publications, Inc.  
A Member of the Gannett Group

## Beyond Reef Somewhere...

By William Marlin  
Reprinted From The Christian Science Monitor

The Pacific island of Saipan is roughly 15 miles by five, and mountainous. Since 1944, when American forces seized it from Japan, it has been, to use a military term, "secure."

The question is "secure" for what? Secure, it turns out, for stateside-style development and commercial exploitation. As a result sugar is not the only kind of cane being raised on Saipan. Native citizens are asking why Saipan, with all the makings of paradise, must go the way of Waikiki Beach and take on the markings of paradise as well. In contrast to native leaders, they are wary of what 10 projected hotels, to be built in the next three years, might do to the island's character and culture.

\*\*\*

To give you some background, Saipan is presently the capital of Micronesia - 2,000 islands and atolls scattered over three million square miles of ocean. Technically, the area is a United Nations trust territory, and has been since 1947. Actually it is an American ward, strategically located for military purposes. During the '50's the Navy administered the trust, fronting for the CIA, which found Saipan a very congenial place to conduct training programs. Such activities kept much of the island's most arable and scenic land off limits. Schooling, health, care, and adequate housing took low priority. What suffered most, however, was native morale. Dependence turned to indolence, which is what trusteeships usually result in, despite laudable aims.

The Navy pulled out of its administrative function in the early '60's and the trust was given over to the U.S. Department of Interior, which looked after it in the first place. Security began to let up, and the natives became increasingly restless. The CIA stomping grounds, with paved roads, nice houses, and a concrete and mahogany clubhouse, were taken over by the Congress of Micronesia, representing the far-flung island groups. The high commissioner of the trust territory, previously headquartered on Guam and appointed by the President, moved in. So did the Peace Corps, and so did political ferment.

\*\*\*

As a result, Micronesian problems came into focus as never before. Right now, the Congress of Micronesia is trying to work its way out from under the trusteeship, and is seeking independence despite the great geographical distances involved. At the same time, Saipan and the other islands in the Marianas chain north of Guam (a U.S. territory since the Spanish-American War) are seeking closer political ties with the U.S.

\*\*\*

If and when the split occurs, and the Congress of Micronesia seeks a new capital elsewhere, Saipan is going to face serious economic and employment problems - worse, even, than at present. The only solution, native leaders feel, is to make the island so attractive to American and Japanese tourists that everyone could go to work being bellhops, or something. Continental Airlines, based in Los Angeles, already has flights going into Micronesia, Saipan's Isley Field, built by the Seabees in 1944 to accommodate U.S. bombers, is being reopened. Since 1968, United Micronesia Development Association, in which Continental has interest, has been encouraging investment in the islands, and has job-training programs under way.

Thing is, jumbo jets lead to jumbo hotels, and Saipan can do without them. What Saipan needs is not expedient, scattershot construction, but a plan by which native contours and native culture could be nurtured, inspiring the design and the scale of new facilities. These should be low-profile, and they should be conceived to grace, not disgrace, the landscape.

A key issue is the location of hotels, brought on by plans to build one on Saipan's most attractive, popular beach. Seeing that the island's shoreline is one of the most breath-taking anywhere - ranging from the sandy stretches on the west (where a reef, six miles out, slows the surf) to the abrupt coral cliffs on the east - it should be off limits to development, which is to say off limits for the enjoyment of everyone, but especially the Saipanese. Where construction is permitted, height limits should be set. One petition circulated last summer, and supported by both the Marianas District Legislature and the Congress of Micronesia, advocated a limit of 50 feet. Such a design discipline, along with an overall land-use policy, must be implemented now to prevent visual-polluting.

This may seem much ado about such a small island. But what is done on (or to) Saipan will influence what is done in other parts of Micronesia. Barely touched since World War II, Saipan is a serene but vulnerable spot where cultural identity should be enriched, not vanquished, by economic forces.

Mr. Marlin is editor of the Architectural Forum.