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**Lands of frustration
and Sweet Leilani**

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PONAPE, Eastern Carolines—The U.S. Trust Territory of Micronesia, including the Northern Marianas, consists of 2,141 islands, 98 of them inhabited, stretching over a greater east-west distance than from New York to San Francisco.

In total land mass it amounts to less than half that of Rhode Island and it contains 120,000 people, about the population of Chattanooga, Tenn. Its water area is larger than the land area of the continental U.S.A. A few of the islands—Ponape, Truk, Saipan, the Palaus—are ruggedly mountainous, but most are atolls, i.e., coral islets surrounding sunken volcanoes.

The native people range from light Hawaiian-type Polynesians in the east to dark, frizzy-haired Melanesians in the west. On Saipan are the Chamorros whose gifted culture was effectively expunged by the zeal of the early Spanish padres.

Throughout the area ancestry is complicated by successive waves of Spanish, Portuguese, German, and Japanese conquerors, not to mention respectable, Congregational Yankees who hit the beach with eagerness in the whaling days.

That small minority of Americans which thinks about Micronesia at all imagines it to be the lands of Sweet Leilani, Dorothy Lamour, and Bali Hai. It is that. It has its dazzling white beaches, crystal clear lagoons and lush tors laden with exotic trees and wild fruits.

It is also a region of frustration. Perhaps Air Micronesia is a good example.

AIR MICRONESIA, wholly owned by Continental Airlines, is an article of faith by Bob Six, Continental's chairman, which is a faith not shared by some of Continental's restive stockholders.

Its skillful pilots take off from Honolulu in Boeing 727s and put down in Johnston Island, Majuro, Kwajalein, Ponape, Truk, Guam, Saipan, Yap, and Palau. Some of the strips are unpaved. Most have no control towers. One (Yap) has a tight 4,800-foot runway. Four of the airport "terminals" are palm-thatched shelters.

To boost the tourist potential of Micronesia Bob Six built fine hotels at Truk, Guam, Saipan, and Palau. With an on-going route from Saipan to Tokyo, Six reasoned, Saipan would boom with Japanese honeymooners and transpacific travelers could be lured to the other islands.

Alas, the Japanese government has stalled the Tokyo extension, using it as a pawn in its game to gain landing rights for Japan Air Lines in the interior United States. The U.S. military on Kwajalein often books the whole plane for the short weekend hop to the Majuro beaches, leaving 100 empty seats on the long haul. And, stuck with a dead-end airline, the fine hotels are mostly empty.

Still, the potential is there. When the Micronesian Tourist Office advertises "more islands than tourists" the exaggeration is slight. Excepting Saipan, there are no crowds, no tourist traps. The native villages are real. The happy children haven't learned to beg and are honestly surprised and delighted with your stateside candy. The bare-breasted women are not stage props. The souvenirs are sparse, usually crude, honest, and made right there.

Micronesia is a place for voyagers who have had it with the Riviera, Waikiki Beach, and the Ginza. It is a last stand of innocence.

TOO INNOCENT, MAYBE. The open boat, sans life jackets, that bounds 10 miles down the lagoon to Ponape's fabulous and ancient Nan Madol ruins leaks so badly that the paying customers have to bail. The 12 miles of coast road sports chuckholes so numerous and profound that you'll never drive your rented car over 15 miles an hour.

On this island where papayas, mangoes, and bananas grow wild you're likely to get canned Hawaiian pineapple juice for breakfast. No one bothers to sell fresh fruit.

Once a major producer of copra, tapioca, and sugar in Japan's Pacific empire, Ponape has slipped into pleasant indolence and a chronic dependence upon the U.S. taxpayer. The plantations have gone back to jungle, broken by an occasional taro patch. By U.S. standards, the average male workday must be about two hours.

Last year U.S. government grants for Ponape's 12,000 people amounted to nearly \$15 million—more than \$1,200 per capita. A new multimillion-dollar hospital lies empty, for the last doctor has departed in protest to the insistence by healthy Ponapeans on moving in with sick relatives.

What has happened is that the welfare state ideas of Washington spenders and empire builders, bad enough where they can be watched by suspicious citizens, have run riot in these distant islands. We are ruining these naive, friendly and charming people as effectively as if we were poisoning their wells.

We ought to stop it before the last Ponapean muscle atrophies into fat.