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Catholic Priest Describes Saipan as Progressive Isle

Pacific Islands Is Potential Trading Area for Ryukyus

By MASAO NAKACHI

(ED. NOTE: The author, Morning Star staff writer, was born in Saipan and was among those Ryukyuan families who were returned to Okinawa and other Ryukyu islands after the American invasion of Saipan. Father Arnold was one of those priests sent to prison camps in Japan after the Japanese military occupied the Marianas in 1941.)

Saipan, the former Japanese-held island in the Marianas from which more than 30,000 Okinawans were evacuated here in 1945, is quite a different place from what it was before the war.

Father Arnold Bendowski, missionary and resident of Saipan for the past 10 years, described the up-to-date conditions on the Pacific island when he made a stopover visit with his colleagues at Kainan Catholic church in Naha last week.

He said that Saipan, a scene of fierce battle between Japanese and American troops in the summer months of 1944, is today a quaint and serene spot in the Marianas inhabited by contented natives and administered by a contingent of U.S. Navy personnel.

Bendowski reported that Saipan today has no strategic value because all the U.S. military installations have either been deactivated or moved to Guam where the strategic air command is located. The pull-out, he said, was completed in 1952.

As a result, he explained, the 7,000 natives (Chamorro) enjoy a self-government virtually free of military influence. The island is a U.N. trust territory along with Tinian and is administered by the United States Navy.

He cited the names of installations such as the naval base at Garapan and the big air base at Asrito that have been out of operation since 1952. The island hides nothing militarily secret, he said.

pan Shipping Co., the only regular maritime service connecting Guam with Saipan.

Bendowski also said that the 7,000 Saipanese today run a democratic system of government with its power divided in three branches; executive, legislative and judicial.

The government is located at Chalan-kanoa and not at Garapan, the latter being the largest town during the Japanese control. Garapan is today a barren field and so is Asrito, formerly a giant air field.

The Saipan congress, he said, is made up of 21 members. The mayor is assisted by 11 commissioners. The island court has one judge and there are 25 insular policemen.

The new island hospital, under construction at a cost of \$800,000 will have 350 beds. It will be manned by two American doctors, six native doctors

and 30 native nurses, the missionary indicated.

The Catholic mission on the island, according to Father Bendowski, has 500 school children and 60 high schoolers attending its classes. There are three priests and 36 sisters.

About 4,000 of the 7,000 natives, he said, live around Chalan kanoa and Susupe and the rest of them are scattered in six villages throughout the island.

A homestead act has been enforced giving four hectares of land to each farming family moving into the new uncultivated area of the island, he added.

He also reported that the Chamorros are predominantly Catholics and their old folks still speak Japanese fairly well, though they have had no social contact with Japanese for the past 16 years.



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American salvage firms, he said, cleaned the island of explosives and scraps left buried from the war. This has helped the natives to pick up sickles and shovels to reopen the arable land for cultivation.

More than 30 percent of the island's fertile land is now under cultivation by natives. They grow coffee, bananas, vegetables, coconuts, melons and also raise pigs, cattle and goats. The cash crops are shipped to Guam.

Under the navy administration which gives \$1 million in congressional appropriation annually, the natives' municipal government has also been rebuilding schools, hospital, electric and water systems.

Father Bendowski indicated that the islanders are short of funds industrially, however. Still untouched by the natives is the sugar refinery which, under the Japanese rule, was the major peacetime industry. The sugar-cane is growing like wild trees everywhere, he reported.

Perhaps, the priest thought, Saipan and Okinawa can establish commercial relations to benefit each other toward industrial progress. Saipan imports Japanese goods through Guam today but no such trade exists with Okinawa, he said.

He suggested some ways for Okinawans to visit Saipan. First, he said, those Okinawans who have friends among the natives on Saipan should write to them and ask them to invite them (Okinawans) there. The natives need only to have the navy's permission to have the Okinawans enter Saipan.

Okinawans traveling to Saipan can board the commercial airlines to Guam and from there board a remodelled mine sweeper operated by the Sai-

← The helping hand?
Father Arnold

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