

# SELF-RULE GRANTED FOR MARSHALL ISLES

U.S. Initials a Pact Giving Limited  
Freedom to the Pacific Group  
but Keeps Military Rights  
1-15-80

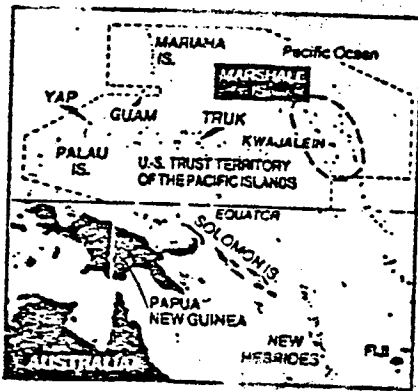
By ROBERT TRUMBULL

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HONOLULU, Jan. 14 — The United States and the Marshall Islands initiated an agreement today granting limited independence to the central Pacific archipelago and assuring exclusive American military rights in the chain for at least 15 years.

The 34 atolls of the Marshalls, comprising more than 600 islands about 2,000 miles southwest of Hawaii, have a total land area of only 53 square miles and a population of 32,000. The islands, whose economy is centered on coconut growing, have been under United States rule since 1945, first under military occupation and then as part of a United Nations trust territory.

Under today's agreement, initialed on the island of Hawaii by Peter Rosenblatt, the head of the American negotiating team, and Amata Kabua, President of the



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Marshall Islands government, the people of the archipelago are to be autonomous in domestic and foreign affairs except in matters relating to defense and security.

The accord, which must be approved by a plebiscite in the islands and by the President and Congress of the United States, is expected to set a pattern for similar settlements with two other groups in the trust territory. These are the Federated States of Micronesia, comprising the islands of Truk, Yap, Ponape and Kosrae, and the Palau Islands in the Western Pacific. A fourth group, the Northern Marianas Islands, has already elected to become a Commonwealth of the United States, like Puerto Rico.

## Economic Assistance Promised

In return for military rights throughout the islands, the United States has agreed to supply economic assistance of about \$90 million a year to the three groups together for the 15 years following the conclusion of the agreement, formally called a Compact of Free Association. Washington is currently contributing \$140 million a year to the management of the islands, which are known collectively as Micronesia but are officially called the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands in United Nations documents.

Formal acceptance of the compact by all the groups is expected in the next few months, bringing to an end nearly 11 years of complex and often contentious negotiations between island authorities and American representatives.

For the 115,000 Micronesians, people whose progenitors are believed to have migrated from Southeast Asia many centuries ago, the compact concludes four centuries of alien rule by Spanish, German, Japanese and American occupiers. The 2,141 scenically lush but economically poor islands and islets, mostly flat coral formations but including some forested volcanic peaks, lie in a broad 2,500-mile-long belt just north of the equator.

Some of the main islands were seized from the former Japanese rulers by American forces in World War II, and the rest were taken over peacefully at the end of that conflict. Washington handed them over to the United Nations in 1947, but they have remained under American administration until now.

## 'Unique Political Relationship'

The accord initialed today "sets up a unique political relationship for which there is no parallel anywhere in the world, or, for that matter, in world history," Mr. Rosenblatt said by telephone from the Kona Hilton Resort on the island of Hawaii, where the agreement was given final shape in nearly a week of intensive discussions.

In the American view, Mr. Rosenblatt said, the arrangement gives the islanders all the attributes of sovereignty outside the defense and security sphere, including the right to make treaties with foreign nations and to "dispose of their resources as they see fit," except that they will probably be unable to qualify for membership in the United Nations.

President Kabua, a prominent island businessman besides being the foremost political leader, hailed the pact as "a wonderful thing" that "restores, more than anything, some kind of dignity and respect, mutually speaking," in the often-contentious relationship between the Marshalls and the United States.

United States rule in the Marshalls has been troubled by the disruption in the normally tranquil life of the islanders resulting from nuclear tests held at Bikini and Eniwetok atolls, which necessitated the wholesale evacuation of populations to unfamiliar surroundings on distant islands, and the use of Kwajalein atoll as a missile range, causing further dislocation of people.

The complex agreement with the Marshalls, which is due to be modified for the other groups, calls for an annual pay-

ment of \$9 million a year by the United States for the use of military facilities in the huge Kwajalein atoll, Mr. Rosenblatt said. The settlement supersedes earlier agreements under which displaced Marshallese received small lump sums and an annual rental of \$750,000 for their lands under military use.