

A Handful of Emeralds

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On Patrol with the *Hanna*
in the Postwar Pacific

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When darkness came and we had to leave, the only islander who spoke English asked me to come again, and I promised I would, knowing in my heart, and to my sorrow, that it was a lie.

Next morning we hoisted anchor and sortied through Salat Pass. The *Romance* was gone, having been hauled into the lagoon by volunteers conjured up by the mission and towed to a repair basin at Moen. Noon found us off Nama, where we traded more of our aspirin and ice cream for more coconuts and papayas. Thence to Losap, hoping this time to enter the lagoon. Bland went off in the motor whaleboat to check the depth of water in Morappu Channel. Although our chart showed just sufficient depth for the *Hanna*, I could not be sure, for the chart was based on a very old survey, and coral grows at a rate of about one inch per year. Bland found suitable depths on the left-hand side of the channel, except for a 2.5-fathom bump, which ruled out the project because the ship drew 12.5 feet, leaving too little margin for error. "I'm sorry," I told Miller, "but I hate writing reports." So we ran around to the south end of the atoll and settled for a brief landing on Pis Island instead.

Off Namoluk Atoll late that night we found nothing amiss that our radar could discern. I lingered for a while on the southwest side, in the lee of the reef, hoping to entice some visitors, but they were either too busy fire-fishing or too awed by our dim and monstrous presence to come out to us. There was no moon, only soft blackness and stars, and along the rim of coral between us and the lagoon, the water lay glistening still. Near the submarine wall of the reef shone scores of orange fires of coconut husks, borne on the platforms of outrigger canoes like offerings to the god of the sea. Dim figures moved near the fires, and when the flames were stirred into up-soaring sparks, there were golden reflections on poised bodies and on up-stretched sails of canoes, and more reflections in the dark water below. What fish—or for that matter, what bird or beast—could resist such beauty?

More Island at Satawan was next, and we reached it in the morning, anchored in the lagoon, and went ashore at a place where about a hundred natives had arranged themselves—providentially and cleverly, I thought—in two lines at right angles to the shore in order to guide us to a safe landing place. This enabled us to step ashore dry-shod over the bow of the boat to be greeted by the chief and his retinue. After the first handshakes someone in the crowd gave a signal (never, in the Carolines, an order), and a hundred voices shouted a phrase of welcome. We all went immediately to

the village under a cathedral-like vault of very old breadfruit trees and entered an open-sided meetinghouse where the welcomers, now doubled in number, seated themselves on the ground, facing our party.

As usual, the local schoolteacher acted as interpreter. He said the people would like to sing something in my honor, and at an imperceptible cue the song burst forth—deep organ tones from the men, perfect harmony and rhythm from the women and children. No one set the pitch or tempo, but there it was. At Lukunor I had been impressed. But here, the flesh of my back tingled and I didn't know for sure if I could hold back the tears. Here were people who had no idea who I might be or if I were kind or whether I hated or was bored with these islands. But I had come, a guest and a stranger, and their hearts were open.

I wanted to do something for them, so I offered transportation (highly irregular!) to anyone wishing to go to Lukunor: a hard day's sail for a canoe, tacking against the wind, but the *Hanna* would be making it in an hour or so. After much giggling it was decided by two young couples that they would go over to be properly married by Father Rively, and the party eventually numbered about ten. While preparations went forward, we toured the immaculate island and admired an old Spanish church that had been spared the fate of its counterpart on Lukunor. Nearby a Lutheran chapel had fallen into sad disrepair, and we were told that there is only one Protestant family left from the days of the Liebenzeller Mission and that the distinction was only hereditary, Satawan society never having been ravaged by sectarian conflict. Not these gentle people.

Wherever we went, they followed us—not to gape but because they liked to see someone admire their homes and because they liked to be near us. Before leaving we bought some of the unusual *kutu* figures for which Satawan is famous, and one of them now sits, hands on knees, watching me with his mother-of-pearl eyes as I write.¹

In leaving I had to pause in the channel, while canoe-loads of exuberant islanders came out from the beach and clambered on board to say farewell to the wedding couples. It was an uneasy time for me, waiting for them there in the 4-knot current ebbing out of the lagoon, but good practice in ship-handling.

A GAME TO REMEMBER

At Lukunor we debarked our passengers and found Father Rively waiting for us on the pier. His first proposal was that we all have a drink of coconut milk.

besides, this is the only means of examining them, since at the distance of a half-mile the passage would no longer be visible. This navigation requires the greatest precision; there must always be a man at the mast-head, a second on the bowsprit, a third on the ship's head, and the pilot (provided with a good telescope) in the scuttle, in order to ward against danger; and Captain Flinders justly observed of these places that "a man who has weak nerves should leave such investigations alone."¹¹

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Treacherous Waters



GUAM

It was the evening of 12 April 1954, and we had been in Guam only a few hours. Those of the crew who had not gone ashore were sprawled on deck watching one of the old movies that circulate endlessly among navy ships and shore stations. I had donned fresh slacks and an aloha shirt and was just leaving the ship when a call came from Captain Klinker: "Joe, how soon can you get under way?"

I tried to sound matter-of-fact. "Well, I have only one boiler lit off, and a lot of the crew are on liberty, but I think we can be ready to go in an hour"—the absolute minimum for warming up the main engines.

"How soon can you be at full power?" I consulted the chief engineer, who had come running.

"One o'clock."

"Okay, here's the pitch. There's a British freighter north of Guam whose skipper has been badly injured, and it's up to you to get him to the hospital. I'll be down to give you the details."

During the next fifty minutes we scrambled to retrieve the liberty party, while more information filtered in: the captain of the *ss Avonmoor*, bound for Fiji, had fallen through a cargo hatch; the ship could not reach Guam

in less than twelve hours; his first mate was afraid the injured man would die sooner than that.

We got all but three of our crew back on board. Bob Miller showed up to cover the story, and we were away from the dock exactly fifty-five minutes from the time of the first telephone call. I cleared harbor cautiously, it being my first night sortie and better to lose five or ten minutes doing so rather than to run aground before even passing the breakwater. The night was moonless and none of the buoys was lighted, but I had a dozen pair of eyes to supplement my own, and soon we emerged safely upon open sea. The engines began drawing steam from both boilers, and by midnight we were ready for full power an hour ahead of promise. I rang up 24 knots (a forbidden speed except in emergency because of the strain on our plant and the prodigious fuel consumption) and held it there.

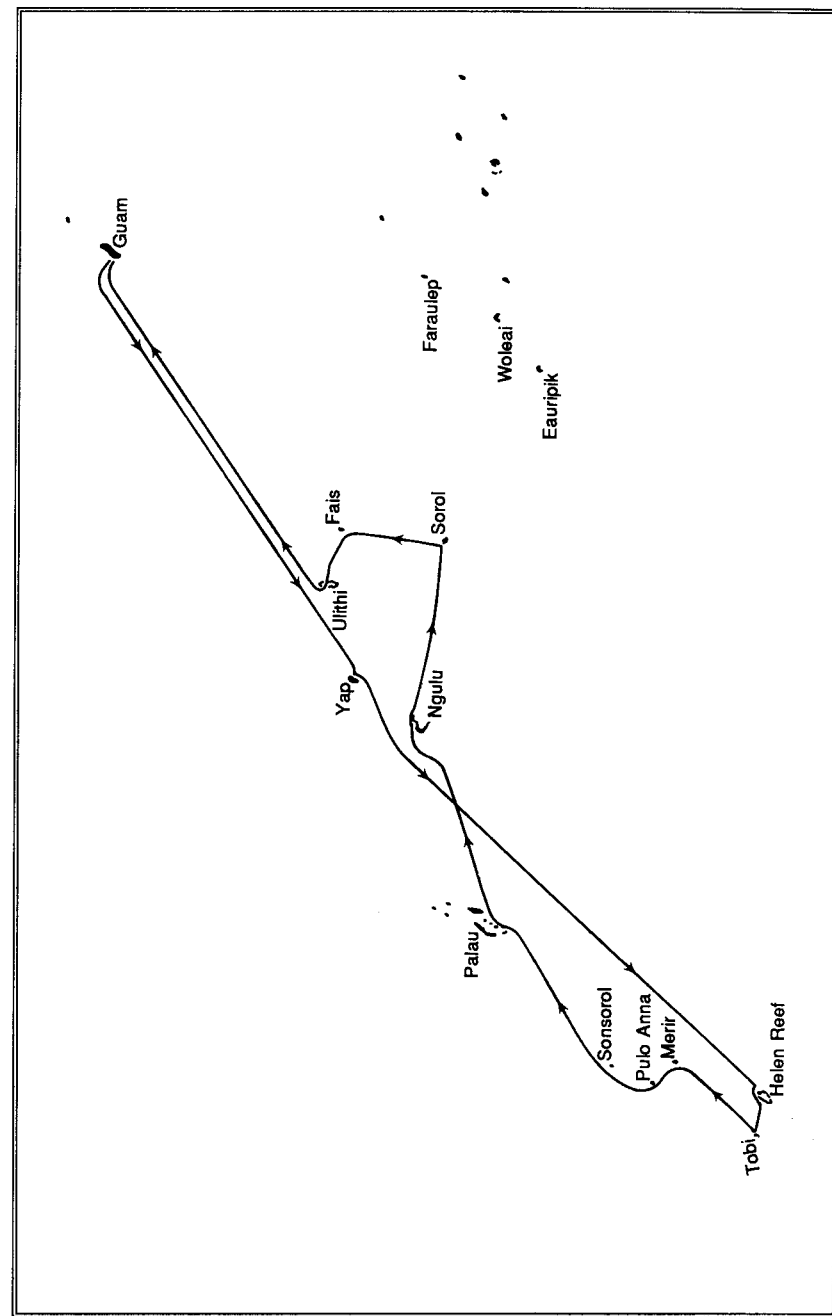
Our first radar contact on the *Avonmoor* was at twenty-four miles straight ahead, showing her dead in the water, somewhat to my surprise—I expected that at least she would have been headed for Guam. It turned out that in addition to other troubles her engineering plant had broken down. By 2:45 A.M. we were alongside and had put a doctor on board, and about a half-hour later we completed the highline transfer of the patient (Capt. Francis F. Gilbert) to our ship.

It was daylight when we passed the entrance buoys of Apra Harbor, still at 24 knots, and I slowed to 15 lest we swamp nearby small craft. In the inner harbor we backed down full and sidled into our berth like a cat on a cushion, within ten minutes of original estimate. I went down to the quarterdeck to witness the patient's transfer to the ambulance. He was yellowish gray, almost the color of death. I was sobered by the sight but glad the *Hanna* had performed well, even though the performance might prove futile. Later I learned that our midnight dash had indeed saved the man's life.

On 17 April we got under way for our second and final patrol of the Western Carolines, stopping at Yap on 19 April and striking southwest from there directly toward Helen Reef, where I hoped to find a poacher or two, the season for gathering trochus shells now being well advanced.

On the twenty-first, hidden in early morning rainsqualls, we swept down like a wolf on the fold. Up to that moment we had maintained radio silence so that trespassers, if any, would have no hint of our approach.

The lagoon was empty. I sent a landing party ashore on Helen Islet. Finding only an abandoned hut and two concrete tanks used for leaching out the shells, they soon returned to the ship. Disappointed, I set off for



Tobi, forty miles to the west-northwest, while I worked off my pique by shooting at flying fish with a .45 caliber pistol, an excellent form of small-arms practice and posing no danger whatever to the fish. Tobi had been neglected until our coming: tiny, remote, said to be "of no interest." Still, where is the island in the ocean that doesn't have a good story?

The first white man to see Tobi was the English freebooter Woodes Rogers, of the *Duke*. He sighted the island 11 April 1710 and logged: "Nothing remarkable has happened worth noting, but that we have generally had a strong Current setting to the Northward. At Two Yesterday Afternoon we made Land, bearing S.E. distant about 5 Leagues, being a low flat Island, all green, and full of Trees. Lt. 2.54.N. This Island is not laid down on any Sea Chart; our Ship continues very leaky."¹ Rogers did not bother to name his discovery, nor did Philip Carteret, who sighted it sixty-seven years later. In 1782 William Hambly also sighted Tobi and named it after his ship, the *Lord North*. That same year a Deutsche Handelsgesellschaft ship, the *Iphegenia*, effected a landing and bestowed on it the name of Johnstone's Island. Seven years later Commo. Joseph Dorrin came along in the *Duke of Montrose* and called it Neville Island.

This proliferation of names was due not entirely to explorers' conceit nor to their ignorance of each others' work. The ocean current in these parts is so swift that it was impossible to get a good "fix" in order to locate the island accurately. Each therefore believed he had made an original discovery.²

Perhaps it was just as well that landings on Tobi were seldom attempted, considering the experience of a handful of men who were forced to spend the years 1832, 1833, and 1834 there, cut off completely from the civilized world.

The New Bedford whaleship *Mentor*, in which these unfortunates had sailed, fetched up on a reef in Palau on 21 May 1831. The survivors established friendly relations with the natives and would have been wise to wait for eventual rescue, but instead they set forth in the ship's remaining boat and a native canoe, hoping to reach the Dutch settlement of Tidore in Halmahera. Three Palauans accompanied them.

One of the castaways, Horace Holden, tells of how the expedition was marred on the third day when the canoe upset, with loss of most of their provisions and fresh water. They divided what was left, four coconuts each, and continued for nine days facing almost certain starvation. To their joy they then saw land about ten miles off and exerted all their strength to reach it. When within about six miles, they could see coming out to meet them a fleet of canoes, filled with naked blacks. Holden narrates the episode:

They attacked us with brutal ferocity, knocking us overboard with their clubs, in the meantime making the most frightful grimaces, and yelling like so many incarnate devils. They fell on our boat and immediately destroyed it, breaking it into splinters, and taking the fragments into their canoes. While this was going on we were swimming from one canoe to another, entreating them by signs to spare our lives and permit us to get into their canoes. This for a long time they refused, beating us most unmercifully, whenever we caught hold of anything to save us from sinking.

After they demolished our boat, and kept us in that condition for some time, they allowed us to get on board. They then compelled us to row toward the land. They stripped us of all our clothing immediately after we were taken in.³

Once ashore amid a crowd of yelling females they were paraded around the island while their captors contended to see who should have them as his property. This was only the beginning. The abuse heaped on the captives during the next two years was such that most of them died. In a bitter outburst Holden declared, "This island, unlike the Pelews, is one of the most horrible and wretched on the face of the globe. . . . The character of the inhabitants much resembles that of the island itself. Cowardly and servile, yet most barbarous and cruel, they combine in their habits, tempers, and dispositions the most disgusting and loathsome features that disgrace humanity."⁴

But Holden admitted that his existence was no better or worse than that of the islanders and that they themselves were incapable of comprehending a better one. His "owner" was the only one who befriended him, hiding him under some thatch after an earthquake had shaken the island and the natives had concluded that the white men must die in order to placate their god "Yarrow" and keep him from sinking the island into the ocean. The crowning indignity came when they tattooed Holden and the others from head to foot, missing nothing, but again he concedes that in the eyes of an islander the undecorated body was shameful and offensive.

On 3 February 1833, just fifty-nine days after the capture, a prospect of rescue appeared off the island in the shape of a British trading vessel. Two of the Americans managed to get out to the ship in a native canoe and win their freedom. But the others were not permitted to show themselves, and the ship's cowardly captain sailed away.

Eight men remained: Horace Holden, Benjamin Nute, Charles R. Bowkett, William Siddon, Peter Andrews, and the three Palauans. Only Holden and Nute survived the horrible eighteen months that followed. When finally the British got around to sending the bark *Britannia* to their rescue, these two climbed aboard stark naked, tattooed and pitifully emaciated.

The experience these men suffered, one notes, does not conform to the usual tales of Micronesian hospitality. The most reasonable explanation is found in Tobi's Melanesian character—the island being only two hundred miles north of New Guinea—for as I have mentioned, Melanesians usually dealt with visitors as legitimate prey.

In spite of this grim background, I found I had nothing to fear in landing on Tobi. The people were Melanesian all right—black and homely as sin, with great mops of frizzy hair topping male and female alike. But they greeted us like long-lost kinfolk and even insisted on carrying me the last fifty feet from shallow water to the beach.

A young dandy stood before me, clad only in a necklace of yellow shells. "My name Ferman," he said. "I am nineteen years."

"I am captain," I replied. "Take me to chief."

Grasping my hand, he led me a short distance to the village, an untidy mélange of shanties and thatched huts among piles of coconuts. The only presentable structure was an open pavilion reminiscent of the bandstand in Feeney Park back in my hometown. There I met the chief.

Chief Tuarmo spoke no English at all, and Ferman's understanding of the language was so sparse that I finally gave up any attempt to communicate other than by the customary signs, nods, and smiles. The gift of a carton of cigarettes caused a yell of delight, and I was duly presented with a pair of beautifully carved "monkey men," the squatting figurines that seem to peer fixedly at one from every angle. Each island follows its own particular style of carving, but I noticed that the closer one came to white influences and the lure of the district trading store, the cruder that style became.

Two massive platforms occupied the center of Tobi's main village. We were told they had been used by the Japanese to mount anti-aircraft guns. I am inclined to believe they may have been older, from a hint given in F. W. Christian's 1899 book, *The Carolina Islands: Travel in the Sea of the Little Lands*, wherein he mentions "Tobi, her massive platforms topped by stone images of her *Yari*, or ancient heroes, gazing out upon the deep."

We shoved off for Merir that afternoon (22 April) and reached it after nightfall. It was too dark for anything but a radar check, for which I was

glad because I had been on the go since four in the morning and had no urge for further investigations that day. We then headed for Pulo Anna and Sonsorol.

The current was so strong that we had to steer five degrees to the right of the track needed to get us to Merir, two degrees to the right to get to Pulo Anna, and four degrees to the right to get to Sonsorol. There is something unnerving in being thus pushed about by a huge silent river, far from any coast, answering not to wind or weather but to forces set up by the rotation of the earth. It must have been even more unnerving in the days of sail.

Weaving thus, we came to the twin islands of Sonsorol and Fana. After breakfast I took landing party number two ashore on Sonsorol, where the village of Tamagl sprawls among the coconut trees. Sonsorol, together with Map Island at Yap, once comprised the kingdom of "His Majesty O'Keefe," that most colorful of entrepreneurs. During our two-hour stay on the island, I could find nothing there to ascribe to him, for much had happened on Sonsorol since his disappearance in 1809. He may have been responsible for the ruined cement pier that once extended to the edge of the reef, but it was impossible to tell, for erosion of concrete depends so much on the original formula and on the temper of the sea.

O'Keefe had had special entree on Sonsorol because on one occasion he saved the natives from starving. It seems that in 1779 or shortly before—well before Spain moved formally to establish title to the Carolines—a Spanish warship landed a party of sailors and marines on the island, and their behavior so offended the native elders and priests that they destroyed the brightly colored cloth the interlopers had set up on a tall stick. The Spaniards then proceeded to burn and pillage the island, even destroying the coconut trees, before sailing away. O'Keefe happened along soon afterward, distributed food to the natives, and transported some of them back to Yap, where they had a better chance of surviving.⁶

The Spaniards' reaction may have derived, in part, from their memory of something that had happened on Sonsorol a century and a half earlier, when the existence of the Caroline Islands was only suspected—a story that merits telling at this point.

THE SANTISSIMA TRINIDAD STORY

In 1696 a group of some thirty natives drifted ashore at Samar in the Philippines and, upon being questioned by a Jesuit priest named Paul Clain (originally Klein), were able to name for him eighty-seven different islands

in the region whence they came. Clearly these islands represented a vast new field for conversion to the faith. Indeed, these particular castaways seemed quite gentle and eager to learn civilized ways. Father Clain's idea intrigued his superiors, including the Jesuit procurator of the Philippines, Father Andres Serrano, S.J., who won for it the support of Pope Clement xi and, through him, the backing of the Spanish Crown—a fact that led to three successive attempts to reach what Serrano called the “New Philippines.” The third of these efforts set forth in a patache called the *Santissima Trinidad*, under command of Sgt. Maj. Don Francisco Padilla, with José Somera as chief pilot, two priests, a lay brother, eighty-six soldiers, and a Palauan family they hoped to repatriate.

Fifteen days after leaving the Philippines they sighted two islands, which Father Duberron named the Isles of San Andreas—doubtless Sonsorol. Somera relates that he sent his assistant to take soundings offshore and that when the ship's boat came within a mile of the island, two canoes came out to meet it: “One of the islanders, seeing a saber, took it, examined it, and jumped overboard with it.”⁷

The sounding party found no suitable anchorage, the depth being everywhere very great, but they learned from the natives that two other islands, Poulo (Pulo Anna) and Meriers (Merir), lay to the south and a large island they called Panloq (Angaur in the Palau Islands) to the northeast. Somera recounts the experience:

The current carried us away to the Southeast so violently that we were unable to reach land until six in the morning of the fourth. . . . I sent the boat to search for an anchorage, but it was useless. The boat returned at four in the evening to report nothing but rocks, at great depth, and it would be impossible to anchor. At nine in the morning of the fifth, Fathers Duberron and Cortil formed a plan to go ashore and plant a cross. Don Padilla and I told them of the dangers to which they would expose themselves, from the islanders of whom they knew nothing, and also from the risk of the ship's being carried off by the current and being unable to regain position to rescue them. In their zeal they refused to listen. They persisted in their resolve. They left Brother Baudin in the ship and embarked in the boat with the quartermaster and the ensign. They also took along the Palauan of whom I have spoken, with his wife and children.

The two missionaries having departed, we held our ground all day under sail against the current, but in the evening the wind died and the current

drove us off. We hung a lantern at the bowsprit all night, and another at the mizzen, to show our position to those on the island. . . . At dawn the large island lay about eight leagues to the north-northwest. Until noon on the ninth we made every effort to approach the land, with no success.⁸

At this point Padilla made a much-criticized decision, under pressure from pilot Somera and the lay brother Baudin, to try to carry out the main object of the expedition by locating “Panloq” and other islands of the Palau group so as to open them for conversion. He expected that winds off Sonsorol might improve in a week or so, and meanwhile the priests who had gone ashore there would be able to take care of themselves.

So the *Santissima Trinidad* sailed off and did in fact reach Angaur on 9 December, where they remained four days—during which time they shot a few natives. (Somera's casual mention of this fact speaks volumes about Spanish methods used “to introduce the Holy Religion among the Islanders.”) On the eighteenth they were back at Sonsorol and plied back and forth all day, and again the next day and the two days following, without a sign of their boat. On the twenty-first a storm drove them off to the westward, “and considering that we had no boat and were short of water, without knowing where to get any,” explains Somera, “we were all of the opinion that the only course we could pursue was to return to Manila with the sad news.”⁹

It must be conceded that aside from his ineptitude in risking his only boat on a strange shore without first coming to some sort of understanding with the natives, Padilla was correct in deciding to abandon the vigil. There was no point in waiting any longer for a sign from the island, for Father Duberron and Father Cortil had probably been felled soon after they stepped ashore.

In the year following the disappearance of Duberron and Cortil, Serrano sailed from Manila in a vessel fitted out to rescue them, but it foundered in a gale even before getting clear of the Philippines. Many of the crew managed to get in the boat but were so flustered they forgot to cast off and were pulled down by the ship. Only Serrano and two Filipinos survived this disaster, which for a time discouraged any further attempt to Catholicize the Palaus from a base in the Philippines.¹⁰

On the shore of Songosor, the larger of the two islands comprising Sonsorol, stands a high wooden cross facing the westward sea. It bears no inscription, nor does it need any, but if I were to compose one, it would read:

*To the memory of two brave men,
Cut off from their own kind,
And cut down alone.*

We reached Sonsorol at six in the morning, steering crabwise four degrees to the right of our intended course, as I mentioned above. While the ship lay off, I went ashore at Songosor with Bland, Savage, and others, using a narrow channel cut through the coral leading to what had been a concrete pier but was now so broken and scattered that we had to wade the last hundred yards.

Songosor has a land area of about 330 acres, compared with 130 acres for little Fama half a mile away. But despite their small size the two islands managed in the old days to produce much copra. Traders like Andrew Cheyne, Alfred Tetens, and "King O'Keefe" found the place useful as an entrepôt, as did the Germans and the Japanese. With this kind of acculturation it is hardly surprising that we encountered none of the generosity met with elsewhere in the Carolines. Every trinket had a price: usually two dollars or two packs of cigarettes—except that a banana fiber *laplap* (*lavalava, maro*) cost a full carton. In other respects the natives seemed to be completely disorganized. The only one who understood English took me to see "number two chief," who had nothing to say—even in his own tongue.

We looked around the village, in the center of which stood a chestnut tree towering twice as high as the palms, within whose branches innumerable terns resided, making it clatter with their comings and goings. The remains of a narrow-gauge railway circled the island, but there was no way of telling whether it dated from the German or the Japanese era, or whether the Japanese had fortified the place in any way.

An air of indecision hung over the island. Some of the natives wore clothes, and others were naked, though all seemed to be tattooed from head to toe. The only purposeful activity I noted was that of a solitary old man splitting coconuts. It remained for an old woman we met along the way back to the landing to make me feel I might be welcome in this corner of Micronesia. Doubled over with age, she hobbled up and pressed my hand to her face—the ancient greeting on Sonsorol.

TRADER TETENS

Lest Sonsorol be thought hopelessly dull, I should tell about Alfred Tetens, master of the brig *Vesta* in the employ of the J.C. Godeffroy firm of

Hamburg in 1865. As in our own case, he had to wade ashore, but he was immediately surrounded in the water by men, women, and children waving palm branches. Forming a litter with canoe paddles, eight stalwarts carried him into the village for a real celebration:

All those who were close enough stretched out their hands to touch my body: it took all my strength to remain upright. Mothers held up their children so that they could stroke my face; where maternal discipline was lacking, inquisitive offspring tried to climb up my legs. While the men and children wondered about my clothes, my beard, and my hair, and especially about the white color of my arms and face, their feminine counterparts could not restrain their even greater curiosity and persisted in trying to take off my clothes or at least shove them aside. As soon as they were convinced I was the same color all over, the women danced around in such a frenzy that I really became very uncomfortable. Naturally I received the signs of friendship and endearments of the ladies with apparent nonchalance; I had no desire to go against the customs of the country. The enmity of the men would be an inevitable consequence, and in that case I should never leave the island alive.¹¹

(Does this give a clue to the fate of Duberron and Cortil, who may have offended the natives by spurning such familiarity?)

By the time formalities of greeting ended, Tetens's white linen suit was so besmeared with the turmeric used by the natives that he decided no soap in the world could get it clean. Divesting himself of the garment, he handed it to the chief, who "under the pardonable delusion that this was a usual form of greeting among white men, seized the trousers and into them tried to force his conspicuously generous bulk." At length, with the help of his retainers, the chief succeeded, and Tetens brought forth gifts of tobacco, fishhooks, flint, and steel. The men ran off to gather gifts in return: coconuts, bananas, chickens, fish, taro, and other delicacies, while the women began a kind of caressing that robbed Tetens of the last vestige of his dignity. "As soon as the bearers of the gifts arrived, I thanked this peace-loving people and returned to my ship. At the promising sight of the delicious fruits, my crew hardly noticed the absence of my clothes. After an interval of five months during which we had had only ship's rations, these fresh fruits tasted superb."¹² Unlike Tetens, I returned on board fully clothed; otherwise, the crew would have had one more wild story to add to their collection.

Tetens proved a skillful trader and excellent seaman. He seemed somehow able to read natives' thoughts and thereby to sense and deflect trouble before it happened—and thus to escape the fate of some of his contemporaries, such as Andrew Cheyne and Philo Holcomb. Instead, Tetens's career in the islands was cut short by a gun accident, following which he returned to Hamburg and was appointed to the most honorable office the city could bestow on a merchant seaman: the post of *Wassershout*, literally "overseer of the water," a kind of arbiter of matters maritime.

We set off for Palau at ten o'clock. During the day a cormorantlike bird flopped exhausted on the main deck and Gunner's Mate Larry Ledford brought it to the bridge: eyes like black buttons in a white-feathered head, long beak, brown cap, and "snood," light brown wings. He hissed bravely at us as I had Ledford put him in a box for release near land. The next entry in my journal, alongside a sketch of the creature, says, "Ledford reports the bird has escaped. Blood on the box, etc. Poor thing." I don't know why, but the incident depressed me. It isn't true that life at sea hardens men. Other things happen to the spirit, but not that.

By 0715 next morning we were off Malakal Passage, with a strong current flowing off the coral shelf at right angles to the narrow channel, so I had to proceed at 10 knots in order to get adequate rudder-response in following its twists and turns. After anchoring with a sigh of relief, I went ashore to confer with District Administrator Don Heron (who split his time between Palau and Yap), and we got to talking about Palau and its fascinating history, well deserving a separate chapter here.

14

The Antelope



Although Drake is believed to have discovered Palau in 1579, and José Serrano most certainly saw it in 1710, the real credit for making the group known to the world goes to Henry Wilson, and this is his story.

At the hour of 1500 on 20 July 1783, the 300-ton packet *Antelope*, Henry Wilson, master, cast off from the British East India Company dock in Macao and headed out to sea, bound for an unspecified destination. On board besides her master were four officers, a crew of twenty-seven, and three passengers including the captain's own son and a half-caste Bengalese "linguist." The ship worked through Bashi Channel between Formosa and the Philippines, then headed southeast. On Sunday, 10 August, they ran into trouble. The sky became overcast, with much thunder, lightning, and rain. The chief mate judged the weather would break and clear up, so he did not consult with the captain or call up extra hands, but about midnight he had the men who were on duty reef some of the sails. Suddenly the lookout shouted, "Breakers!" and the ship struck.

George Keate, Wilson's scribe, depicts the scene in his *Account of the Pelew Islands*:

A moment convinced them of their dreadful situation; the breakers alongside, through which the rocks made their appearance, presented the

most dreadful scene, and left no room for doubt. The ship taking a heel, in less than an hour was filled with water to the level of the lower hatchways. . . . Orders were in consequence instantly given to secure the guns, powder, ammunition, and small arms, and that the bread and other provisions as would spoil by wet should be brought on deck and secured by some covering from the rain; while others were directed to cut away the mizzenmast, the main and fore-top-masts and main yards, to save the ship and prevent her from oversetting, of which they thought there was some hazard, and that everything should be done to preserve her as long as possible.

The boats were hoisted out and filled with provisions and water, together with a compass in each, some small arms, and ammunition; and two men were placed in each boat, with directions to keep them in the lee of the ship, and be careful they were not staved, and to be ready to receive their shipmates in case the vessel should break to pieces by the dashing of the waves and the violence of the wind. . . . The people now assembled aft, the quarterdeck laying highest out of the water.¹

The captain gave a pep talk, stressing that shipwreck was something to which all mariners are liable and that such occurrences were often rendered worse by the despair and discouragement of the crew, to avoid which he urged everyone not to drink any "spirituous liquor." Everyone agreed, whereupon they all had a couple of glasses of wine. As Keate continues, "The dawn of day discovered to their view a small island to the southward, about three or four leagues distant, and soon after other islands were seen to the eastward. They now felt apprehensive on account of the inhabitants."

The choice of a place to land, as land they must, fell on a small island to the south that appeared least likely to harbor large numbers of hostile natives. Fortunately the *Antelope* was lodged on a leeward reef, or she would have broken up long before her crew could have abandoned ship in so orderly a fashion. Fortunately as well, Henry Wilson's leadership was such as to suspend for a time the old law of the sea whereby the crew of a ship cast up on a foreign shore are free to fend for themselves as individuals.

The island (apparently Aulong, otherwise known as Apurashokuru) proved to be uninhabited and was blessed with a sandy cove, a lush growth of palm and breadfruit, and a stream of fresh water. During that day and the next, many trips were made with the jolly boat, the pinnace, and a makeshift raft, so that the entire party got ashore with ample provisions

and tools by the night of the eleventh. Meanwhile they had a visitor, the brother of a local potentate and a sort of minister of war, calling himself Arra Kooker. The tension of first meeting dissolved in wonder:

The natives were of a deep copper colour, perfectly naked, having no kind of covering whatsoever; their skins were very soft and glossy, owing as was known afterwards to the external use of cocoa-nut oil. . . . They were of middling stature, very straight and muscular, their limbs well formed, and had a particular majestic manner of walking; but their legs from a little above the ankles to the middle of their thighs were tattooed so very thick as to appear dyed a far deeper color than the rest of their skin; their hair was of a fine black, long, and rolled up in a simple manner close to the back of their heads, and appeared both neat and becoming. None of them except the younger of the King's two brothers, had a beard; and it was afterwards observed in the course of a longer acquaintance with them that they in general pluck out their beards by the root; a very few only who had strong thick beards, cherished them and let them grow.

The appearance of the Englishmen was no less amazing to the natives, who at first believed such white skin must be artificial: "They expressed a further desire to see their bodies; upon which some of the men opened their bosoms and gave them to understand that all the rest of the body was the same. They seemed much astonished at finding hair upon their breasts, it being considered with them a mark of great indelicacy, insomuch as they eradicate it from every part of the body in both sexes."

When the visitors had gone, Wilson held a council and pointed out that the initial friendliness of the natives might, with luck and discretion, be perpetuated indefinitely or at least long enough to permit the castaways to build a vessel out of the timbers of the *Antelope*. It was unthinkable that they should wait idly for possible rescue, so they set to work immediately on the project.

A few days later the "king" himself, with a cortege of splendid canoes, came to see the strange inhabitants of Aulong Island:

When they had come in as far as the tide would permit, it was signified to Captain Wilson that he should go out and meet the king; on which two men took him up in their arms and carried him through the shallow water to the canoe where the King was sitting on a stage in the

middle of it. He desired Captain Wilson to come into the canoe, which he did, and embraced him informing him through the interpreters that he and his friends were Englishmen who had unfortunately lost their ship, but having saved their lives by landing on his territory supplicated his permission to build a vessel to convey themselves back to their own country.

After a little pause, and speaking with a chief in a canoe next to him (which we learned afterward was the Chief Minister) he replied in a most courteous manner that he was welcome to build either at the place where he then was or at his own island; told Captain Wilson that the island he was then on was thought to be unhealthy; that he feared his own people might be sickly if they stayed on it before another wind set in, which he said would be in two moons.

Wilson decided to stay where he was, however, because of the relative security of the small island—a wise choice in view of the native propensity that had led Drake to call Palau the “Island of Thieves.” Lest the “king” (whose chiefly title of *abba thule* was mistakenly thought by the English to be his personal name) and his warriors think their guests completely powerless, Wilson staged a demonstration of musketry, firing three volleys. This had a sensational effect, and the “hallooing, hooting, jumping, and chattering” of the natives almost turned into a riot. The king was mystified when a bird was shot down, for he had not seen anything pass out of the gun. Another source of wonder was an ordinary grindstone, and the natives were further delighted by two dogs the white men had with them, for they had never seen a quadruped larger than a rat.

The king and his party finally left and paddled around to the other side of the island, where they camped for the night, leaving a few of their number with the English. Just as the Englishmen were dropping off to sleep, these few began a song so shrill that it was thought to be a war whoop or a least a signal to the party on the other side of the island to come and attack:

The English instantly took to their arms, and Messrs. Baker and Sharp ran to the tent where Captain Wilson was, to see if he was safe. They informed him of the apprehensions of our people, who were all under arms; he requested Mr. Baker to return immediately to them and desire them to make no show of being alarmed, but to keep up their guard until they should find what the meaning of this might be, adding that he would come to them as soon as he might do it without being noticed;

he requested Mr. Sharp to sit down by the king's son and enter into some conversation with him by signs.

They were much relieved on realizing that the natives were only “tuning their voices.” Arra Kooker “gave out a line or stave which was taken up by another *rupak* (chief) seated at a little distance who sang a verse accompanied by the rest of the natives present, except himself and the Prince. The last line was sung twice over, which was taken up by the natives in the next tent, in chorus; Arra Kooker then gave out another line which was sung in the same manner; and this continued for ten or twelve verses.” When the song ended, they asked to hear some English songs, and a young fellow named Cobbledick readily complied, with sea songs and songs of battles that so pleased the king that whenever they met afterward, the king would have him sing one or two.

In the next few weeks the castaways barricaded their tents and continued to recover stores and materials from the wreck. In a makeshift dockyard above high water they worked with “utmost assiduity,” and with considerable help from the natives, to construct a small vessel. When the planks were fitted into place, the natives gave them red and yellow ocher paint; they also showed them how to pay the seams with chinam (powdered coral) mixed with grease. As time passed, some of the castaways ventured among the larger islands—Babelthuap, Urukthapel, Eil Malk, and Koror itself, where the *abba thule* had his power base.

According to Keate's account, the *abba thule* ruled not as a despot but more as one whose virtues inspired respect and obedience. He acted in no important matter without consulting his *rupaks*. In council he always sat on a particular stone with his advisors around him, their faces averted whenever they addressed him. Offenders brought before him were punished by censure alone, more crushing than blows.

Every man's house and canoe were considered his private property, as was the land allotted to him—for as long as he occupied it. If he moved with his family to another place, the ground he held reverted to the *abba thule*, who then gave it to whomever he pleased.

Keate notes particularly that the attention and tenderness shown to the women and the deportment of the men to each other were such that the English never saw any behavior with the appearance of contest or passion; everyone seemed to attend to his or her own concerns without interfering in the business of neighbors. Keate further assures his readers that the

natives in general "rejected connection with our people, and resented any indelicate or unbecoming freedom."

The natives rose at daylight and would immediately go and bathe in fresh water. After breakfast, if a council was to be held, the abba thule met with his rupaks, while the common people went about their daily occupations. The active day usually ended about two hours after sunset, but on festive occasions the islanders might dance all night. Palauan dancing, the English noted, consisted not so much in "capering" as in a peculiar posturing, very low and sideways, singing all the while. After each stanza the dancers would bring themselves together, lifting up the feather tassels that they held in their hands and giving them a clashing or tremulous motion, then suddenly pause, shout "Weel!" and begin anew.

The abba thule's realm did not encompass all of Palau: there were dissident tribes on Babelthuap, and Peliliu and Angaur maintained complete independence. Ever since one of the abba thule's brothers and two of his rupaks had been killed during a festival in Ngatengal on Babelthuap, a state of war had existed between the tribe of that place and the people of Koror. It was probably inevitable that Captain Wilson should be drawn into the struggle in view of the proven marvels of his firearms. When the abba thule asked to borrow some of these for use by his own men in a projected expedition, Wilson may have been reminded of a similar request made on Magellan, and its tragic results, or he may have foreseen the abuses to which such favors might lead in years to come. Nonetheless he could not refuse without offending the people on whom depended all hope of the English castaways' returning to civilization.

So on the morning of 21 August, before daybreak, five armed Englishmen mustered in front of the council house along with a horde of natives carrying both long bamboo spears tipped with betel-nut wood for use at close quarters and notched arrows for use with throwing-sticks at distance (not found elsewhere in Micronesia):

The English embarked in five canoes and went away to the eastward about ten or twelve leagues, calling as they went along at several of the King's villages to refresh and reinforce. At half an hour past two in the afternoon they met the enemy. The King had with him now one hundred and fifty canoes, on board of which were considerably above one thousand men. Of the enemy force our people could form no certainty. Before the action, Arra Kooker went in his canoe close to the town and

spoke to the enemy for some time, having Thomas Dulton in the boat, who had directions not to fire until such time as the signal which had been agreed upon had been given him.

Arra Kooker's speech was received with great indifference. He then threw a spear at the enemy, this being the signal. Immediately there was a salvo from English muskets. One man fell, causing great confusion among the enemy, who abandoned their canoes and swam off as fast as they could. A few more volleys were fired. The victors landed, stripped a few coconut trees, and carried off some yams and other foodstuffs, whereupon the fleet returned homeward, highly pleased with themselves, stopping at several places along the way, where the women brought out sweet liquor for their refreshment.

Back in Koror, a great feast was prepared, with pigeons, turtle meat, and other delicacies. One enemy warrior had been taken prisoner, and the English tried to intercede for his life, to no effect. "Prisoners must always die," the abba thule insisted, "for it has always been so. Besides, if I were to release this man he would return to his people and betray us all." Meanwhile the captive awaited the final blow calmly and, when it fell, died with his eyes fixed on the English, not so much in reproach as in wonder.

There were additional expeditions in the next few weeks, each more elaborate and bloody than the last, each augmenting the abba thule's dominion well beyond traditional limits, although the English did not seem to understand this perfectly. At any rate it was a relief when the new ship was ready to launch and the English could be on their way.

With the goal in sight, a tide of doubt swept over the whites. Had they made themselves so useful that they would not be allowed to leave? What was the meaning of the knotted cord that the abba thule always carried? Why did he keep asking them for muskets and powder? In a fever of distrust, the English decided that they would turn on their hosts at the last minute and then scramble out to sea. Keate was ashamed to write that "the lives first intended to be devoted were those of the King and his minister, the facetious and inoffensive Arra Kooker."

The subtle change in their demeanor was noticed by the abba thule when he came to watch the launching, and he guessed their thoughts. In the stilted language ascribed to him by Keate, he asked, "What is there can make you doubt me? I never testified any fear of *you*, but tried to convince you I wanted your friendship. Had I been disposed to have harmed you I might have done so long ago: I have at all times had you in my power. . . .



The abba thule of Palau, 1783, from a portrait by Arthur William Davis (1763–1822), apprentice draftsman on the *Antelope* packet.

Can you not confide in me at the last?" As Keate exclaims, "Under what sun was ever tempered the steel that could cut such a passage to the heart as this just reproach of the king?"

The launching was successful; otherwise, the English might have spent the rest of their lives in Palau, for their tools were worn out. They christened the ship *Erelong* (for Aulong) and set about fitting and provisioning her. The abba thule had a son about fifteen years old, named Libu, whom he prevailed upon Wilson to take back to England with his own son, saying (in Keate's words, of course):

I would wish you to inform Lee Boo of all things which he ought to know, and make him an Englishman. . . . I am well aware that the distant countries he must go through differing much from his own may expose him to dangers, as well as diseases that are unknown to us here, in consequence of which he must die; I have prepared my thoughts to this; I know that death is to all men inevitable, and whether my son meets this event at Pelew or elsewhere is immaterial. I am satisfied with what I have observed of the humanity of your character, that if he is sick, you will be kind to him; and should that happen which your utmost care

cannot prevent, let it not hinder you, or your brother, or your son, or any of your countrymen, from returning here; I shall receive you or any of your people in friendship, and rejoice to see you again.

On the day before departure, a sailor named Madan Blanchard asked to be left behind. Keate describes him as a man "of singular character, about twenty years of age, of a rather grave turn of mind, at the same time possessing a considerable degree of dry humor; and what rendered the circumstance of his determination remarkable is that it is well known that he has formed no particular attachment on the island. His good-tempered, inoffensive behavior during the voyage had gained him the regard of all his shipmates." Since there was no dissuading him, Wilson suggested to the abba thule that he desired to leave Blanchard in order to help the Palauans, thinking this idea might improve his chances of being well treated. The tactic was to prove a mistake, however, for it placed this illiterate seaman of obscure intentions in the apparent position of being the representative of the British.

When the ship was ready to sail, the natives came with so many gifts and so much food that the *Erelong* could not hold it all, and some islanders were hurt when their gifts had to be declined. Wilson's last act on the little island that had been their home for the past three months was to have a copper plate fastened to a tree: "The Honorable English East India Company's Ship the *Antelope*, Henry Wilson, Commander, was lost upon the reef north of this island in the night between the 9th and 10th of August; who here built a vessel, and sailed from hence on the 12th day of November, 1783."

The English reached Hong Kong without mishap, sold the boat, divided the proceeds, and dispersed. Wilson returned to England with Libu, where his adventure created a sensation and reinforced romantic notions of the noble savages of the South Seas. London society was fascinated with the handsome lad, but like many another exotic visitor he died before he could escape England's climate. His father may have had a premonition of this, but at any rate the abba thule kept his promise always to welcome the English to his island, and so did those who succeeded to his title.

Seven years after the wreck of the *Antelope* the Bombay office of the East India Company moved to investigate the islands Wilson had reported, sending out the ship *Panther* under self-styled "commodore" John McClure to chart the waters around Angaur and northward, as well as a second ship,

the *Endeavor*. McClure's navigator, a Bostonian named Amasz Delano, afterward published a set of sailing directions that included a statement with which I can most heartily concur: "I must urge great caution upon every stranger how he enters among (the islands); and after all the most minute description would be insufficient for his safety."³ Delano tells of Madan Blanchard:

He became arrogant and licentious, as persons are apt to do when raised to great power and consequence. The natives told me he would take their taro root, coconuts, yams, canoes, wives, and everything he chose; and if they made any complaint would contrive to have them beaten and disgraced. What little address he had with the King was greatly assisted by the fear which the King entertained, that Blanchard might be able to make the English believe on their return to the islands, if he were offended, that the nation had been insulted through him and that vengeance ought to be taken. He continued this course of abuse for nearly three years, when he went over with a rupak who was his favorite, with six or eight men to a small island where the people had been injured by him. In the evening a quarrel arose and Blanchard and his party were put to death, except two who escaped in their canoe.⁴

Unfortunately the abba thule misconstrued Blanchard's status to the end and punished his executioners.

At the time of McClure's visit the abba thule was still having trouble with the Ngatengal tribe, and again he asked for help in attacking them. This time the aid was given without compunction, and again there was the formal notification of hostilities, the great assemblage of canoes, the stately advance of opposing fleets, and the senseless bloodshed. It was all very interesting for the visitors, but McClure would not allow any of it to be logged, especially the fact that his own launch, flying the British ensign, had taken part.

McClure was a would-be empire builder, like so many men who came to the Carolines. He later returned to the island as a private individual with a collection of seeds and plants—together with, in Delano's words, "three or four female slaves of Malay, from nine to twelve years old, which he purchased at Timor; some males of Malay; a Bombay female born of European parents, and five or six male slaves from different eastern coasts."⁵ He lived with this menage for several months, then left with his male slaves for Macao to buy a ship with which he returned to Palau, loaded up the rest of his household, sailed away, and disappeared forever.

15

The Sea Their World



PALAU

On 23 April 1954, during our second visit to Palau, Don Heron received a message from the U.S. Coast Guard that worried him: "Mogmog natives question whereabouts six canoes twenty five men left for Fais Island trading expedition last month x should have returned two weeks ago x air recco at Fais discloses no Ulithi canoes."

"I can't understand it," he said. "The two places are only fifty miles apart. They could have changed their minds and decided to go somewhere else, of course. But I wonder if you'd mind checking Fais anyway, to make sure they aren't there."

"Not at all. In fact I was planning to have a look at the place."

"The weather hasn't been bad, or I'd say they'd been caught in a storm. In any case, the Ulithians are excellent navigators."

"Well, it's still possible they are at Fais, because the canoes could be drawn up under the trees where they couldn't be seen from the air. I'll find out, anyway." I also promised to keep a sharp lookout for the canoes in the open sea between Palau and Ulithi even though the chance of finding anything in so vast an area would be remote indeed.

a year chopping down the tree and fashioning the deep keel and curving the hull of their graceful lateen-rigged canoe.

The high commissioner of the Trust Territory, Frank E. Midkiff, took interest in repatriating the voyagers and now set about recovering their canoes. He appropriated \$5,000 of TTPF funds and won the support of the Interior Department, the U.S. Navy, and the U.S. Coast Guard. Through the embassy in Manila, Midkiff gained cooperation of the Philippine government, so that one fine day a vessel of the Pacific Far East Lines arrived in Ulithi's lagoon, bringing home the three precious canoes.

"For three nights the fires burned around the dancing areas," wrote Father Walter in his newsletter, "and teams of men and women took turns weaving patterns in the flickering light, chanting sagas of the great deeds of the Americans. From the time that a thousand ships anchored in the lagoon during the late war, the Americans have been regarded as supermen. . . . What other nation in the world would have been so generous?" Other canoe expeditions before and since have lost their way or been storm-driven into oblivion, but none can have had a happier outcome.

But all of this was long ago. The need for long canoe voyages has passed in Micronesia. In recent years safer and more reliable interisland transportation has become available. The *Chicot* was decommissioned in 1951 and transferred to the Department of the Interior. Other vessels have been added. In 1965 the TTPF administration signed a two-year contract with the Micronesian Shipping Line (a subsidiary of the United Tanker Corporation) to operate the *mv Pacific Islander*, *mv Gunners Knot*, and *mv Palau Islander*. Two 100-foot diesel vessels were put in interisland service, and in 1968 a ten-year contract to operate all the territory's logistic shipping was signed with Micronesian InterOcean Lines. The *mv James M. Cook* was also added for field administration of public health, educational, and community development services.

I expect that the deep urge to venture forth in great canoes lingers, however, and I hope the skills of the old navigators in reading wind, waves, and stars may still be remembered somewhere in Oceania.

Father Walter, I understand, died of throat cancer in New York in December 1975. He had left Ulithi and for a time sought relief on the mainland, in the Washington area, but his body was sent back to Ulithi for a splendid funeral and interment on Mogmog, close to the people he loved and whom he had served so long and well. He was a great man.

The other missionary whom I came to know and admire in Micronesia was Father William Rively of Lukunor, whom I first met on the occasion of the reefing of the mission schooner *Romance* at Truk. Recently I heard from Father Francis X. Hezel, the tireless teacher and historian, that Father Rively had come in from the Mortlocks and was living in semiretirement on Weno (formerly known as Moen) in Truk and, further, that the *Romance*—or more properly the *Star of the Sea*, her registered name—was being used less and less as the years passed and hence in the early 1980s had been sold to a private group on Truk. "Sadly, they neglected the ship and eventually let it sink in the boat pool at Weno, where it became the *Star Under the Sea*, in common parlance."⁷

One of Father Walter's monuments was a concrete-block chapel completed on Mogmog after we were there. When typhoon "Ophelia" swept over the island on 30 November 1960, the chapel provided shelter against winds estimated at 120 to 135 *knots* and saved many lives, as did a smaller wooden structure on Asor. The coast guard station on Falalap stood but was inaccessible because of the stretch of open water between that island and the Ulithi reef. Most habitations were swept away; canoes were broken and taro pits filled with sand; and on the northwest side coconut trees were smashed and uprooted. The TTPF administration sent an agricultural officer to supervise the planting of twenty thousand coconut seedlings, and these thrived so well that four years later a visitor reported them "already far higher than the wildest predictions."⁸

Many typhoons have struck Micronesia in recent years. In March 1961, "Sally" brought major destruction to Palau. In November 1967, "Emma" savaged Yap and northern Palau, and in the same month "Gilda" hit Rota. Five months later "Jean" created havoc in the Mortlocks, Truk, and the Marianas. In 1969 there was "Elsie," in 1971 "Amy," in 1990 both "Owen" and "Russ," in 1992 "Omar," and in 1994 "Zelda"—each leaving wounds. The most spectacular was "Steve" in 1993, accompanied by an 8-Richter quake that shook the new luxury-hotel industry of Guam and Saipan to its foundations. Most comparisons fail, but I am led to believe that "Doris," which struck the Marianas in 1953 when the *Hanna* was on the scene, was more costly in terms of human life—specifically the crews of two navy weather planes—than any of the others. I wish it had not been so.

Natural disasters, however, failed to discourage the tourist industry, a fact exemplified by the opening of the \$800,000 Hotel Taga in Saipan in 1967. In 1968 foreign nationals with visas were for the first time allowed to enter