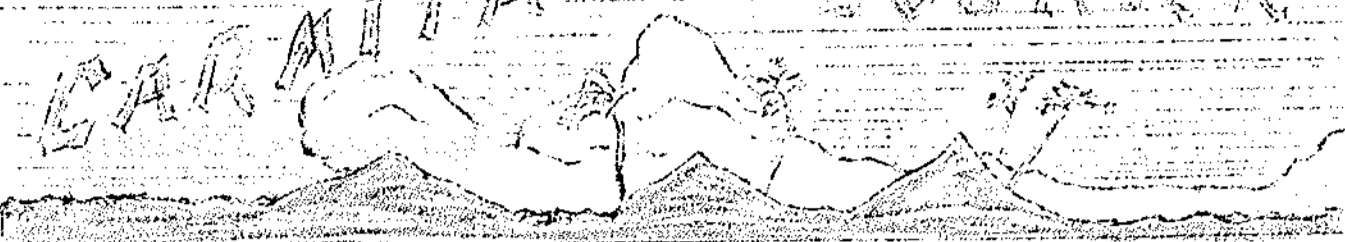


Rec'd April 27-45

CAROLITA

506 R. D. 12



Sunday

PACIFIC ATOLLS

15 April 1945.

You ask me what it was like to be in  
that country,  
and I answer, The wind leaned always  
on the land  
out of the sea, and life looked to-  
ward the sea.

It was good, there, to walk into  
morning  
fresh as that wind, the tawny and  
green fronds  
clashing aloft, and the clean new  
sunlight  
washing the sanded street. And in  
that country  
the tide of noon flowed gently up  
between  
the houses plaited of leaves; deep  
pools of shade  
lay boldly-patterned and velvet-  
dark, and the mats  
were kind to our bodies as the after-  
noon  
ebbed gently.

And at dark the fires of husk  
glowed in the coral dooryards. The  
low moon  
gleamed, melon-colored, and the  
night was sown with stars.

Then dancing feet stirred pebbled  
sand, and all the songs  
were love songs. It was good to rest  
on the smooth mats  
as the cool night crept softly  
out of the sea.

There was peace in that far country,  
where wind of night  
was a long caress to the sleeper -  
and all the stars  
over that country were kind.

Clifford Gessler

(Carmel, Pine Cone-Cymbal.)

Editor: Clive N. Pillsbury, Y2c.  
Radio Press: William F. Askew, Tech. Sgt.

LIGHT & SHADOW

USS CARMITA (IX-152),  
"Somewhere at sea",  
15 April 1945.

Dear Folks,

You, like many others, may be curious about the coral atolls, vitally important stepping stones along the Tokyo road. Scientifically we might trace the evolution of these "sleepy lagoons", the first if not the only extensive land network on the face of the globe artificially created, by launching into a dissertation of anthozoans, a Greek term for 'flower animals', marine coelenterates, which thrive in warm ocean areas of moderate depth and by chemical processes convert abundant sea salts into incrustations, the exterior, shell-like structure of the strange coral animals.

Veering from the technical, there is another school of thought which asserts that the origin of the atolls springs from a wardroom session of the Olympian gods, then preparing for extended leave in the galaxy of stars, considering the scuttlebutt that outcasts from Tartarus, the infernal regions, as far beneath Hades as Heaven is above earth, had concocted a tale of descent from the sun, concealing more logical ancestry. Shall we say, "Darwin was right".

Returning to the Olympian session, Zeus, detecting in deceit the eventual eruption of trouble rivaling the infamous opening of Pandora's box, sought means of checkmating the threat. Mars suggested a solution in that the continent to the east was rich in the sinews of war which might be brought to bear across Poseidon's, or Neptune's realm if only there existed enroute an occasional anchorage with a sandy bar where weary lads might relax and enjoy a few cool draughts of beer. Hermes, winged messenger, urged space where future men with wings might alight, rest and then continue onward. Up spoke Aphrodite, also known as Venus, favoring an Elysium, a place where it is always June, time for play and romance, where the fruit of the harvest is ever on hand, and struggle and hardship unknown or soon forgotten. The session closed with a directive given Neptune to carry on.

Reference to his hydrographic charts revealed to Neptune volcano craters scattered about as desired and suitable for the project. Chits were signed and the C.B.'s (Coral Bugs) detailed as permanent working parties to construct atolls. Finding the warm, tropical water just right for "sacking in", the C.B.'s built themselves into the delicately patterned structure and knocked off permanently when properly relieved. Gradually atolls took form as coral reefs broached the surface. Allowance lists prepared by BuIsles then brought delivery, f.o.b. the reefs, of silt from the ocean floor, sea weed to help cement the structure, and debris from the surface including rafts of vegetation with seeds to build these beautiful isles of somewhere.

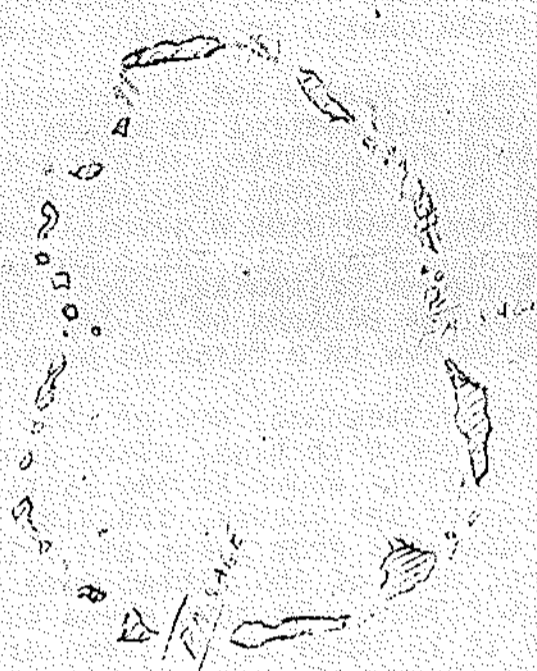
Complements next came aboard, fish for submarine duty, crabs and shell life for work below and above deck, lizards and rats to man the deck, and a few bats and an occasional bird for work aloft. Last, the carefree crews of Micronesian sailors and Waves shoved off from Asia to seek freedom aboard these tropical Shangri-las.

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Having accepted the construction version of your choice, let us leave mythology and science to reflect individual impressions of 20th century life aboard coral atolls of Micronesia.

A typical atoll consists of a necklace of small islands, ranging from a few square yards to a couple of square miles in area, linked and fringed by reefs, outlining the crater rim of a long silent volcano which many centuries ago sank beneath the waves. These islands, usually with a maximum height of six to ten feet above sea level, rise from a flat shelf or coral reef which 50 or

100 yards out breaks off sharply into a steep slope like the face of a dam, and here the breakers surge and sing through caverns and fissures in the jagged edge of the reef.



Typical atoll  
outline.....

On the inner sides of the islands may be found gleaming white beaches. Many interesting shells are tossed up by wind and wave while the restless water, continually advancing and receding, is laden with fragments of coral and shell slowly being ground by the tumbling process to fine sand, forming inviting beaches.

Out in water of swimming depth may be seen live coral gardens, many clumps resembling from above the heart cluster of a cauliflower except that variety in color is the rule, ranging from white through the pastels into many bright shades. Dotted here and there are curious sea shells, - with rythmn and graceful form added to the scene by tropical fish splashed with bright colors matching the variegated pattern of the coral. Recessed pockets in the outer reef shelter crabs, sea snails, eel, octopi, sea anemones; and now and then a sea urchin, resembling in pattern a dahlia with long, narrow petals, the lower ones like conical spikes purple or magenta in color and similar to petrified wood.

The outer margin of an atoll has the fresh tang of wind and the melodious thunder of rollers dashing a lively barrage of spray along the reef with undertones of coral lumps rattling noisily in the backwash.

Back of the narrow, sandy beach is the grateful shade of coconut palms, affording relief from the blinding glare of the sun. Here and there sunlight filters through their fronds illuminating the underbrush with flickering patterns of light and shadow. While the gracefully curved coconut palm is dominant, island growth includes breadfruit trees, the beach plum, custard apple, banana palms, the screw pine or pandanus, plantains, guava bushes and the scarlet hibiscus.

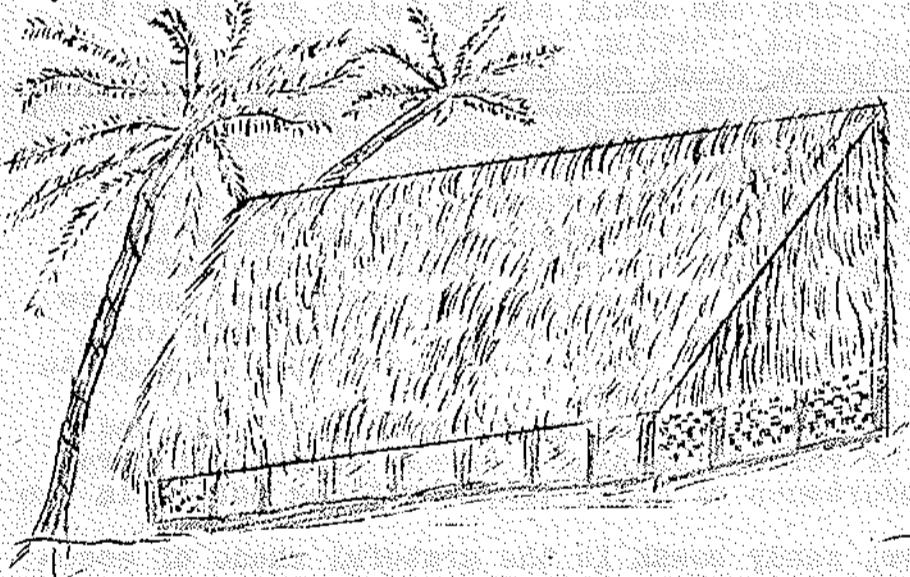
The natives of Micronesia represent a distinctive race that emigrated from Indonesia about the 13th century. They are hardy, wiry people of small stature, about 5' to 5' 4" for the men, a trifle less for the women, and of a deep coppery color. Suple and muscular, most of them can scale a palm, walking up the trunk as readily as we climb a ladder. Clothing is simple, merely a breech-cloth for men, and for the women a skirt woven of coconut fiber or, in some localities, a pandanus mat skirt. Shoes are not worn, their feet becoming toughened in infancy to sharp coral and scorching stones. Ornamentation varies but is not very extensive aside from tattoo work. Needles, of bird or human bone, dipped in carbon from charred coconut husks is the basic method for decorating but in some places more modern tattoo needles and varied color pigments are used. With few exceptions no religious or other significance is attached

to the art, designs, which usually encircle the arms and legs, being selected solely for glamor, with blue the favorite color. A bizzare effect is acquired through blue body stripes from head to toe like those of a polecat. The beauty treatment is painful therefore tattoo designs are applied a bit at a time. Other ornamentation includes ear pieces, necklaces of matched shells or shark's teeth, and bracelets cut from large shells.

Tribal government differs in places but is essentially democratic, leaders exercising a benevolent control in matters concerning the general welfare. One atoll for example, with a number of inhabited islands, is headed by a King, elected for life by vote of the male population, who governs together with a council consisting of the chief of each individual island colony. In turn an area King exercises sovereignty over a number of atolls.

The council house, narrow but perhaps 60 to 100 feet in length, is taboo to women. When not in use as a forum it serves as sleeping quarters for unmarried men.

Family dwellings, always rectangular, are of wood and thatch construction; practically all roof with high, steep gables reaching close to the ground. Great skill is shown in the fitting of hand hewn timbers and in the laying of the thatch, creating storm proof houses. Use of nails, many salvaged from boxes and drift wood cast ashore, is a recent innovation; most of the timber work being lashed securely with braided coconut fibers. In some areas the floor is an elevated platform, in others it is built up of stone or from coral sand, covered with matting of strips of pandanus leaves, made pliable by steeping in salt water. Exterior walls may be open or covered with basket weave matting of pandanus leaves or palm fronds. They find no need for furniture, closets or multiple rooms; large, loosely woven baskets serve as catch-alls for their few possessions.



NATIVE  
DWELLING

An unexpected luxury yet common to these islands is a large community bathing pool, located in a low, shady spot, and complete with rock border and stone steps, not unlike ancient Roman baths. These pools are reserved for women and infants. While they fill with rain water they are usually brackish due to seepage. Coconut oil is added to the water for a beauty dip, which is then followed by a rub down with coconut oil perfumed with flowers.

The coconut is the staff of life, providing food, drink, shelter and clothing. The oil of ripe coconut is used to protect the body from salt water and skin troubles. The tender heart of the coconut palm is used for salad, - nutritious but not especially tasty. Ripe nuts are husked with a spike and the meat grated with a piece of coral. Fine scrapings are diluted with water to creamy paste much relished with fish. Oil is obtained by exposing to sunlight grated coconut in a wooden bowl, the oil collecting in the bottom of the bowl. The sweet and slightly acid sap of the palm is obtained by tapping or cutting the end of a flower bud, allowing the sap to drip into a receptacle as with raw maple syrup. This is then boiled until thick and sweet unless an intoxicating beverage is desired in which event the natural sap is allowed to ferment, quickly producing a potent drink. When fresh water is scarce a

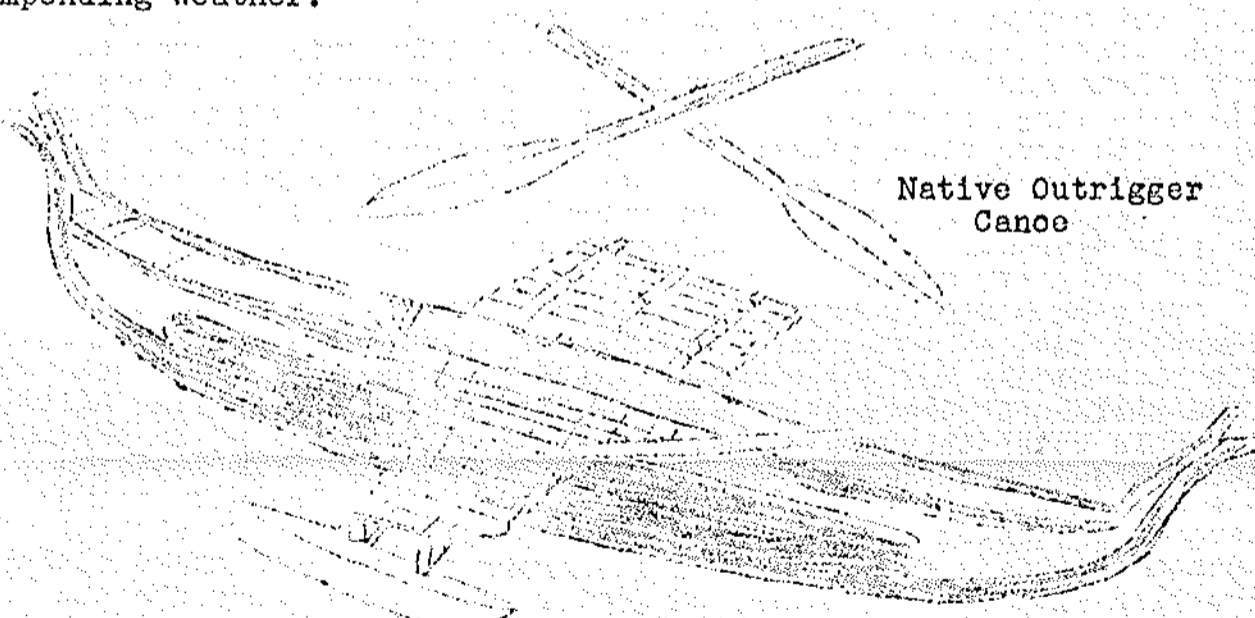
refreshing drink may be obtained by cutting into a green coconut. The natives are dependent on rainfall for fresh water, generally collected from palms by guiding the run-off with troughs made of plaited leaves into vessels or lined wells.

The fruit of the pandanus, and fish of many kinds including turtles, squid and shark, are highly important staples which they serve in many ways. Pigs and chickens are raised, and such vegetables cultivated as melons, taro and yams. Breadfruit, calabashes, bananas, papaya and arrowroot just about round out a balanced diet. Rice and tinned goods are frequently obtained in trade but the natives are content without these products.

Kava is a beverage prepared for ceremonial occasions by crushing the root of a pepper. The concoction tastes like soapsuds hence its merit and appeal must lie in the fact that it's slightly intoxicating.

Where we chew Wrigley's for diversion, the natives chew the betel nut, preparing a quid by wrapping a slice of the nut together with lime from a gourd in a leaf of the pepper plant. It is mildly narcotic and has the effect of stimulating a generous flow of artistic red saliva.

Fishing is the chief activity of atoll dwellers and thus you find them with collections of skilfully made, ingenious tackle. Their most important possession is generally a canoe of trim lines, perfectly streamlined and expertly built from planks lashed together with coconut fiber. Prow and stern posts are forked like a lizard's tongue or the "V" for victory sign. Sails, of plaited pandanus leaf, woven so tightly as to be wind and waterproof yet highly flexible, are of the lanteen type, triangular in section with yards at both sides and suspended from the masthead. An outrigger float serves as a stabilizer, and the sail must be kept trimmed, just so full of wind, to heel the boat to leeward so that the outrigger float is poised just above the water. A platform built over the outrigger supports permits a sailor to shift his weight there should the outrigger rise too high. All boys are early schooled in piloting and celestial navigation. Knowledge handed down includes behavior of ocean swells deflected by the presence of an island; color of water and suspension of foreign matter in water flowing from a reef or beach; indications of land from birds and marine life; and signs of impending weather.



Native Outrigger  
Canoe

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There is yet a third phase of this story of Pacific atolls and this is a close-up scene aboard a Navy ship at anchor. On deck toward noon it is often torrid despite temperature statistics to the contrary. Shade in some of the compartments, particularly anywhere near machinery or a galley range, may be even less comfortable. The heat wanes in the afternoon along with the ebb of energy leaving a satisfying drowsiness.

On or off duty, the cool surf nearby and the enticing shade of waving palms might as well be a mirage for each vessel is a self-contained city, a sort of multiple hermitage, which the fellows rarely leave. Strangely when an occasional lull permits a few mid-afternoon hours on the beach many pass up the chance having found that distant pastures are not always as green as they seem.

The enervating effect of heat is such that even with motion everywhere, in the line of snow-white surf rolling over the submerged reef, in drifting clouds overhead, in small craft darting here and there, in topside operations, the picture becomes monotonous and boredom blots up conscious thought.

Night under a star-studded sky brings soothing breezes, comforting laziness envelops the atmosphere. The skyline is aglow with light, the hum of activity continues but a bit subdued, and signal lights stab the sky with sharp jabs. It's movies time, the title doesn't matter, the change from reality to illusion is welcome and stimulating.

The picture's over, lights are blinking out, 'tis cool on deck or so it seems by contrast with noon, - time for reverie. How easy it is to no longer see the harbor nor hear the surf, to be lost in dreams, amid fields of poppies in California, row on row of spirea in the Ohio country, waving masses of peonies in the midwest, the blazing azaleas of the East or the fragrant lilac in the South, - what wouldn't we give for a magic carpet to be whisked home again.

Now it's night, taps and time for repose. Often there is something mildly oppressive about sleeping in a compartment; the soft slap of air from an oscillating fan proves disturbing. Many sleep on deck, - a canvas cot, a pad covered with a clean sheet, topped with an individual, miniature prairie schooner cover of canvas, or miniature tent. It's cramped but cooler, pleasant if you don't mind being aroused by the gentle tapping of rain, - sometimes the rain beats an insistent call like an alarm clock or the rattle of machine gun fire.

We find factual the saying, "Blood thins out in the tropics". 'Tis one of nature's means of acclimatizing men for their own comfort and as protection from heat and humidity. The red blood cell count, normally around 5 million per cubic millimeter in the States, falls to 3 million. This does not reflect an overall drop in red cells but rather an increase in the plasma or fluid content of the blood. In disposing of body heat the capillary vessels near the skin dilate more or less continuously and permanently and thus to fill this large increase in capillary capacity the system compensates with more blood plasma. Other adjustments and changes take place such as lowered blood pressure and changes in personality with a growing irritableness and surprising tendency to be forgetful. Don't be alarmed, - counter adjustments are made soon after return to the temperate zone.

We gain a new understanding of the changes that convert a go-getter into a beachcomber. There's a resemblance in this tropical experience to Ulysses encounter with the Sirens, a lure that was irresistible but which he escaped by the foresight of having himself lashed to the mast and his men's ears filled with wax while passing the danger zone. The strands by which we are kept from settling into the quicksand of tropical languor are many. The Navy stands guard by assigning us watches and duties to perform; a healthful routine including daily refreshing showers and well balanced meals; diversion with movies, music and games. Formost strands are the love, cheer and news from home, making mail the favorite "tie that binds".

Forgive us when we write common-place letters, lacking in news and warmth. The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak. We exert our utmost but can't recall the bright stories we intended telling; if we succeed in "sweating out" a few paragraphs, ten to one we can't find the right words to make the letter sparkle. Truly, there may not be much news, we may have forgotten what we wrote last, but we haven't forgotten how wonderful you are nor how much we love you, so next time one seems humdrum just pause and think of the torment here, torn between an overpowering drowsiness that fogs the mind and

Kindles the urge to say "Manana", and the desire to turn out a letter with zest, one brimful of love and sustaining cheer.

These Elysian Isles may bask in perpetual June, but not the kind of June that means love and romance to me, nor the kind meant by the line, "What is so rare as a day in June, for then if ever comes perfect weather", for the latter kinds I shall forever associate with you.

Affectionately,

*Bill*

P.S. This is another in a series of informatory, "now it can be told", letters.

P.P.S. Hope you enjoy this folks. I think you will find it interesting.

THOUGHTS FOR TODAY

Give me a rose  
And you may take  
All the perfumes and essences man can make.

Give me a sunset  
I'll leave to you  
The canvas it's painted on - gilded frame too.

Give me a spring,  
I'll let you sip  
Of the dust-flavored nectars that stain the lip.

Give me a song  
From a happy heart,  
And I will have touched the world's highest art.

Margaret S. Phillips.

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CENSOR'S NOTATION

\*\*\*\*\* I was shanghaied, ----

J. T. Korzeniowski.

Censor: The correct word is "inducted".