Through a Glass Darkly: Palau's Passage Through War, 1944–1945

KAREN R. GEORGE

On March 30, 1944, the violence of World War II reached the Palau Islands. Aircraft from US Navy carriers launched air strikes on Japanese installations in the island group. In September 1944 the southern islands of Angaur and Peleliu were invaded by US troops. The 183 Islanders remaining on Angaur took refuge in caves for over 3 weeks before emerging to live under American military government until the end of the war. The northern islands of Babeldaob and Koror were "bypassed" and "neutralized." Marine aircraft based on Peleliu made regular daily strafing and bombing raids over the islands. Palauans on Babeldaob struggled for survival, enduring air strikes, famine, and increasing Japanese brutality. This article reconstructs these different experiences of war in Palau by integrating Palauan voices with American military records.

In the dawn light of March 30, 1944, aircraft from the US Fifth Fleet's Task Force 58 came out of the sun and swooped low over the airfield at Airai on Babeldaob. The planes skimmed over Koror's Malakal Harbor and struck at Japanese airstrips on the southern islands of Peleliu and Angaur (see map of Palau). This attack on Palau was designed to provide strategic support for an April operation at Hollandia in New Guinea. The raid would destroy Japanese aircraft and shipping throughout the area so that they could not be used to obstruct the Allied landings (Morison, 1953, p. 28).

At the Airai airfield on that March morning, Palauan workers under the command of Japanese soldiers had just begun the day's construction

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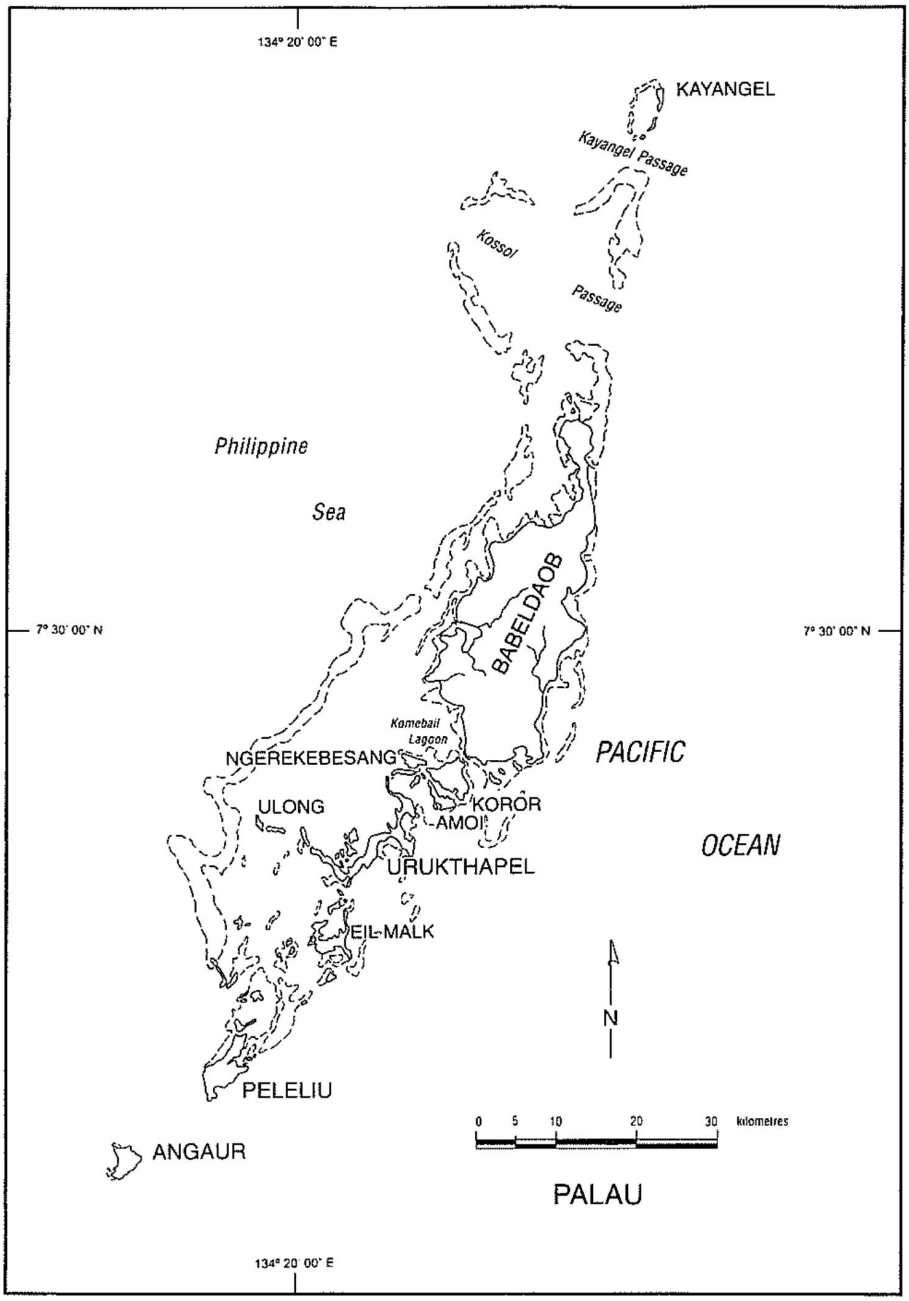
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work. Fourteen-year-old Minoru Ueki was employed with his schoolmates in helping to build the new airstrip. He remembers

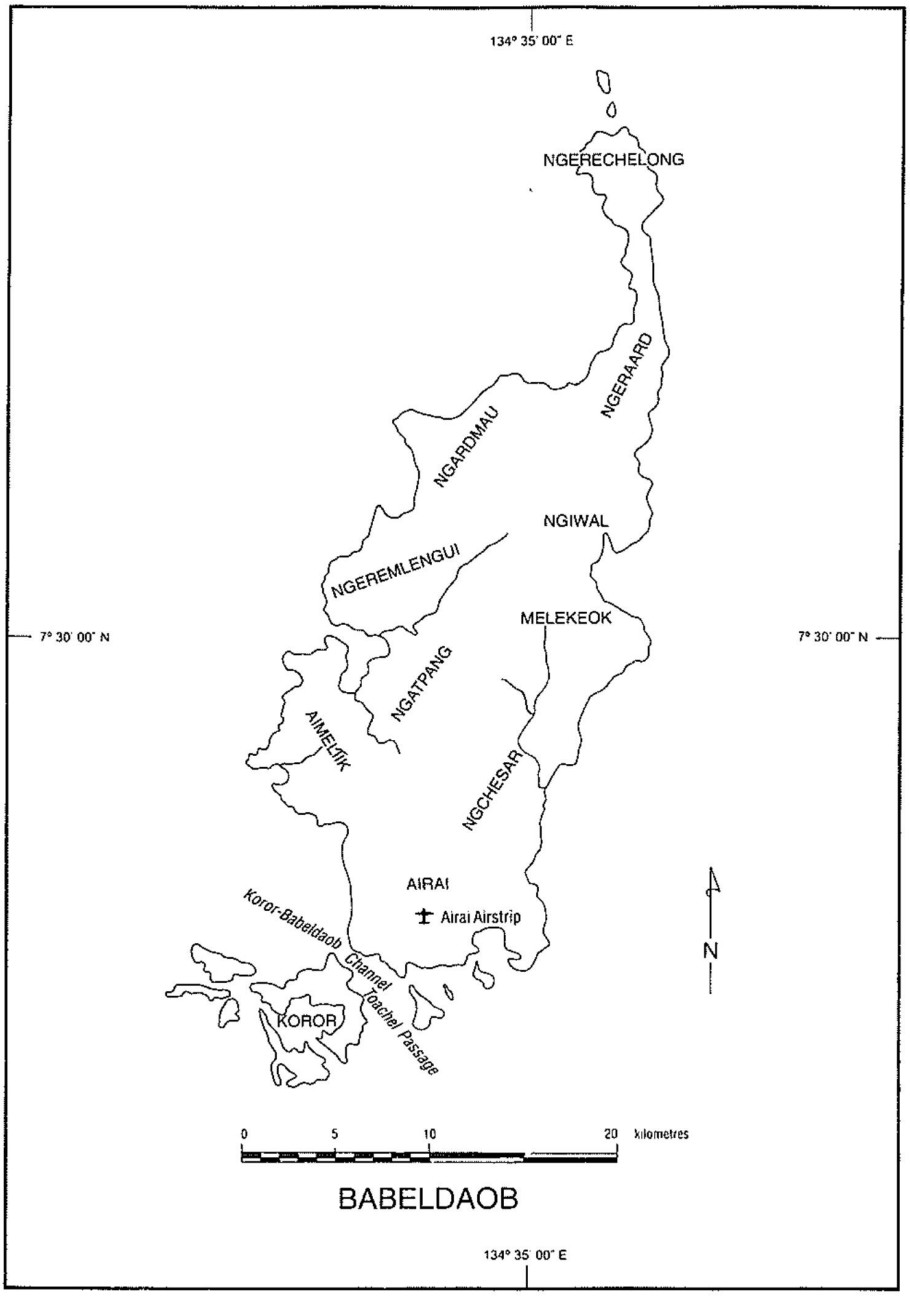
> The planes just appeared and began to circle around the place and many of us were saying, even some of the Japanese soldiers were saying, "They're our planes. They came from Saipan. . . . They are here to help us, they are looking after us." And then all of a sudden they began to attack us, right there in the field, and so we had to run. . . . Two of my classmates were injured; two died, one of them right in front of me.

Mengesebuuch Yalap (born 1929) was in Aimeliik, on Babeldaob, that day (see map of Babeldaob). She too thought the planes were Japanese and ran out to greet them. She recalls:

> The reason we thought they were Japanese was that the Japanese planes usually practiced up in the air doing circles and things, so we ran out to look. . . . There were nine planes. At the front was the first group of three and then other groups of three, right and left. They all started shooting. . . . It was kind of funny for me at first because I was young, but when the fires started all over Koror we realized that we had to hide ourselves. . . . When the bombs came down they exploded, really big. We were like mice trying to hide ourselves in the bushes or anywhere we could cover ourselves.

Others shared this initial belief that the planes were Japanese. They expected to look up and see Japanese aircraft, but when the planes suddenly began to fire, people followed basic instructions they had learned from the Japanese or they responded through an instinct for survival. Minoru Ueki, despite the shock of seeing his friends die, acted quickly because of his previous training. The Japanese had assigned him to a working group, so he joined the other members and fled into the jungle to find shelter. Mereb Eruang (b. 1914), employed as a watchman in Koror, held his post and waited for orders, while Direou Orrukei (b. 1925), also in Koror, "had no idea what [she] should do" because she "did not know what a bullet was, or that it could kill." Rose Adelbai (b.1921) recalls: "We knew it was a war, but we didn't know what was going on because it had never happened to us."

On Peleliu and Angaur people reacted in similar ways, taking shelter wherever they could, some in prepared tunnels, others in natural caves or in the jungle. A young woman told how she "didn't know that the shots could kill, that you could die from these things." Obechou Delutaoch (b. 1917) stared in awe when the planes started firing. In fear she fled to her family's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cave under one of the Rock Islands, thinking all the time "This is probably war, war starting."

How much people knew about the war influenced how they reacted to this first bombing raid. As historian Mark Peattie reveals in his study of the Japanese in Micronesia, preparations for war in Palau had begun in the 1930s (1988, pp. 230–256). Those who were employed by the Japanese and those who lived in Koror gained some knowledge of the approaching war; others heard nothing but "the word that was going around," the rumor of war (Benged Sechewas, Tibedakl Olblai). In her work on the war in Palau, Wakako Higuchi (1991, p. 146) states that as early as 1940, the Japanese "sponsored . . . daily activities for the purpose of raising the nationalistic consciousness of both the Japanese and the Islanders." These included days of worship, patriotic marches, restraint and frugality, and defense training. Firefighting groups and other voluntary organizations sprang up among the Islanders and Japanese, and Palauans contributed their savings in support of the war effort. With these developments, Higuchi states, "Palauan knowledge of the national situation deepened" and they "came to understand the war situation" (1991, pp. 147–148). Information collected in the course of my 43 interviews with Palauans in 1990 suggests that this understanding was limited. During the prewar period, those Palauans who had close contact with the Japanese and took part in these activities and organizations developed a raised consciousness about being a part of the Japanese world and about the war effort. But did they know what the "war effort" truly meant? Having no history of modern industrial warfare, Palauans knew of war only in its traditional sense of small-scale conflicts between districts, villages, or clans. Almost all had heard rumors about war in varying forms, but no one at this time could know the actuality of large-scale mechanized war, and they therefore had no frame of reference through which to understand what was likely to happen.

After the March raid the Japanese began to evacuate people from the southern islands to Babeldaob. Obechou Delutaoch (b. 1917) remembers being transported from Peleliu by boat to Ngaraard. There was no choice, said one woman (b. 1927): "I didn't really want to leave Peleliu. I didn't want to go up to Babeldaob." Baiei Babul (b. 1921) recalls that people were afraid of moving, but the Japanese said they had to go "because of the war—Peleliu was going to get the worst of it."

Although all Islanders were evacuated from Peleliu, nearly 200 people

did remain on Angaur. American invasion operations in the Mariana Islands during June and July meant that bombing raids in the Palau area also increased and worsened, with the consequence that no more boats were allowed to make the northward journey from Angaur to Babeldaob. Sixteen-year-old Mathias Akitaya's family had decided they were going to stay despite the Japanese command that everyone must leave.

> But around the end of July, because of the decree from the soldiers, they were going to force us to leave. But then there were no boats allowed in the channel between Peleliu and Angaur, so we were kind of stranded (Mathias Akitaya).

By August 1944 the focus of air raids against Palau changed. No longer support missions for other operations, the raids were now directed at "softening up" Palau for the projected invasion. American strategists had originally planned to seize Babeldaob for a major base in the Western Carolines; however, following support and reconnaissance operations over the islands in June, they estimated that Babeldaob was heavily defended by nearly 37,000 Japanese troops. To attack Babeldaob "would not be worth what it would cost" (81st WDHC, 1948, p. 46), so the Americans decided to take the more lightly defended southern islands of Angaur and Peleliu instead. The invasion was set for September 1944. The nature of the experience of war for the people stranded on Angaur and for those in refuge on Babeldaob was therefore initially determined by American planning. Outside events shaped inside experience.

During August the 868th Bombardment Squadron, based at Los Negros in the Admiralty Islands, carried out night bombing raids on the Palau group using B-24 bombers and destroying shipping, airfields, and Japanese defense installations. In early September daylight raids were added and bombers swept over the islands daily, tearing up the airstrips and reducing the town of Koror to smoking rubble. As D-Day[1] for Peleliu approached, carrier-based aircraft from Task Force 38 were also brought in, and for a week they ranged over and strafed the islands in nearly 1,500 missions (Craven & Cate, 1983, pp. 299–300, 306). Palauan memories of this period before the September landings hinge on the type of bombing they endured, which was determined by where they worked or took refuge. Koror saw heavier and more intense attacks from high level bombers; Babeldaob saw more intermittent strikes by carrier-based aircraft. Angaur and Peleliu were "softened up" by both kinds of attack.

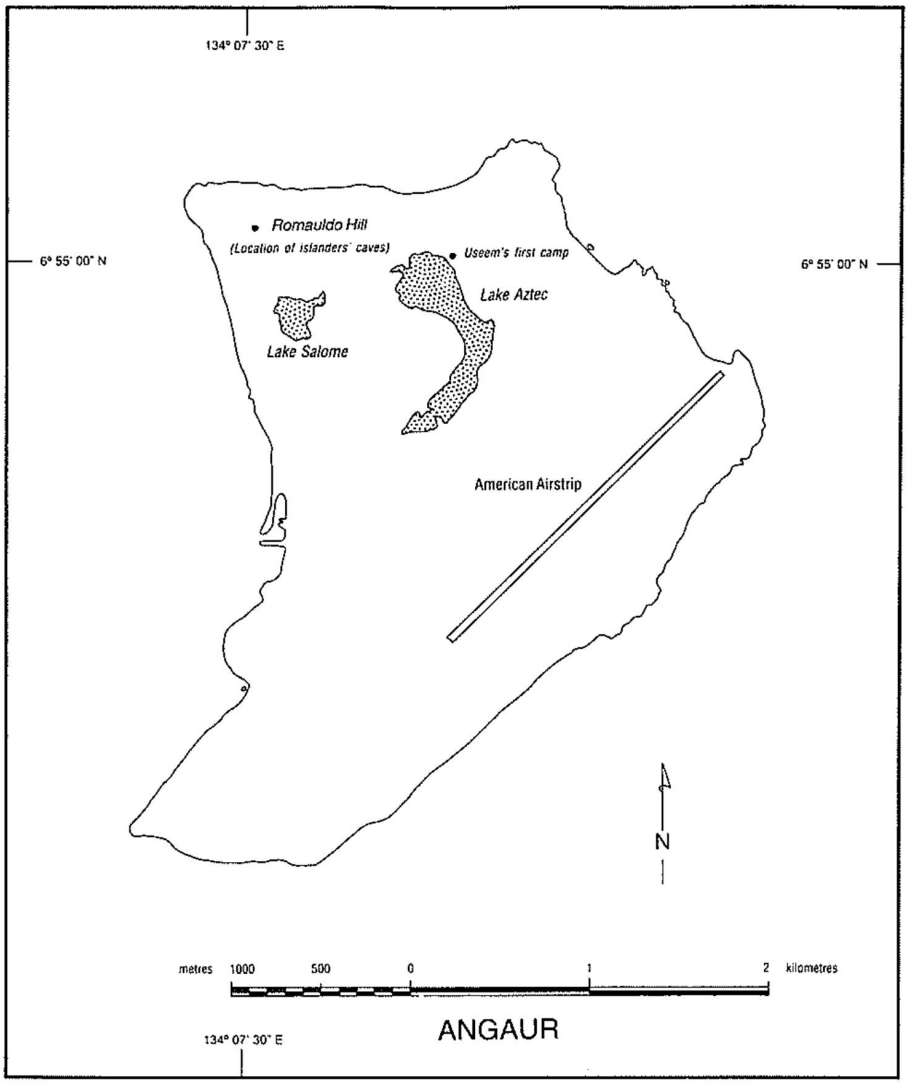
WAR ON ANGAUR

At break of day on September 12, 1944, 3 days before D-Day for Peleliu, the prelanding bombardment of the southern islands began. Battleships, light cruisers, and destroyers pounded the islands with shells, stripping down the jungle. Fighters from carrier groups swept overhead, strafing constantly. For 5 days shells and bombs pierced the island of Angaur (Craven & Cate, 1983, pp. 307–308; Morison, 1958, pp. 34–44). During the earlier raids in September, people had sought refuge in caves in the rocky northern end of the island. During these days of bombardment, nobody ventured outside. "There was no sense in going out. We didn't even know what was going on outside" (Mathias Akitaya). But outside, fires were burning and black smoke billowed. As shells hit, debris was thrown high into the air, including whole trees and clouds of dirt and dust (81st WDHC, 1948, p. 70). Inside the shelters the Islanders could see nothing and the noise was deafening. Smoke hung low in the sky, and the earth shuddered with the force of the explosions. The cave in which Robert Eldukl (b. 1917) took refuge was not really a cave at all, but instead

> two sides of big rocks standing together. . . . There were openings and sometimes bullets would come inside. . . . But we were at the end . . . and the shape was like this [V-shaped], two rocks meeting, long and narrow, so that there was a gap in the middle and the bombs could come in.

The smoke from the explosions seeped into these "corners of rock," and all that people could do was wait in fear to see what happened. They could not even talk during the bombardment because of the noise.

The first American troops of the 81st Infantry Wildcat Division landed on Angaur early on the morning of September 17, making slow progress through the debris from the shelling, the fallen trees, tangled wire, and land mines (81st WDHC, 1948, p. 70). US Navy Lieutenant John Useem, the man who was to be responsible for the civilian inhabitants of this battlefield once they had been coaxed out of hiding and into American hands, came ashore in the third wave of assault troops. His team of military government personnel disembarked the following day. Through interrogation of Japanese prisoners of war, it was ascertained that the Islanders had taken refuge in caves on the northwest tip of the island. Useem therefore selected a site for his camp at the northern end of Lake Aztec, close to the 81st Division prisoner of war stockade (see map of Angaur). He needed to be close to



the action and near the aid stations so that medical relief would be available to the civilians when they emerged (John Useem).[2]

Air strikes and naval bombardment continued almost 24 hours a day over the next 4 days. By the fourth day the southern end of the island was declared secure, and fighting then became focused in the north, the "toughest terrain on the island" (81st WDHC, 1948, pp. 96–98), where the Japanese had fortified themselves and where the Islanders had taken refuge.

From her shelter among the rocks, Sister Elene Ebud (b. 1917), a Palauan Catholic nun, could hear the roar of the planes,

> the boom, boom, boom from the ship, the cannons and the machine guns . . . as they shoot from the boats. . . . Then the planes shoot also and they drop bombs. There was a lot of smoke, and somebody died. We were very afraid and we just prayed for our Lord to help us.

Night and day no one could sleep because of the noise and the constant fear of what was to come. As the days passed, hunger and thirst became pressing problems. The available food, dry rice and a few Japanese cookies, was divided. Sister Elene made sure that a little more was set aside for the children. Before the invasion Robert Eldukl was part of a team that, under Japanese orders, hid food in various locations around the island so that if Americans captured one stockpile there would be another point to go to for food. During the early period in the caves, the people "relied on those foods" (Robert Eldukl), and small groups of men would venture out at night to collect supplies. However, it was not long before the last rations were burned and destroyed in the encroaching fighting. Eldukl remembers the day when nothing was left and a Japanese soldier said to him "Now we will have to learn to eat leaves and roots." Masao Guiliberte (b. 1922) remembers that the food shortage did not concern him very much: "Because of fear . . . we didn't really know that we were hungry."

On September 20 the Americans declared Angaur officially secure, but the fighting, or "mopping up" as it was now called, continued fiercely and unabated (81st WDHC, 1948, pp. 100–101). From that day until early October, heavy artillery was aimed day and night at the Japanese stronghold in the Angaur Bowl and Romauldo Hill area in the north. Angaur was now in American hands, but for the Islanders that meant only that conditions became much worse. "The Japanese and the Palauans were now at the front line together" (Mathias Akitaya).

The Islanders knew that the rocks could not provide complete protection. A young woman, Kesiil Kaich (b. 1926), was shot in the arm while inside a cave. Mathias Akitaya and his sister were in their shelter when a shell exploded near the entrance. The flying shrapnel hit Mathias' sister in the leg, and he was injured in the back. Sister Elene's cousin was killed by shrapnel.

As the days passed, however, the biggest danger came not from shells but from lack of water. The only water to which people had access was the small amount that dripped down the walls of the shelter and collected in the

crevices of the rocks. Beyond this, men had to risk going out at night to the marshy area around nearby Lake Salome, right on the front line, to collect the brackish water (Mathias Akitaya, Masao Guiliberte). Rain showers were therefore a blessing. Mathias recalls his relief when the rain came through a gap in the roof and ran down the sides of the shelter.

> One night I was sitting, leaning against the rough stone . . . and as I was sleeping there were drops of water dripping down onto my stomach. So I had a big bowl, a Palauan bowl carved out of wood, and all night I held that bowl, waiting for each drop to fall and finally it filled the bowl, and that was one time we drank pure water.

On September 24 the Americans began broadcasting to the Japanese to induce them to surrender (81st WDHC, 1948, p. 111). They hoped this would also allow them to establish contact with the Islanders. There was some fear that the Japanese were "holding the people against their will" (Richard, 1957a, p. 612). Robert Eldukl heard this broadcast and recalls that it was in Japanese. He thought it was one of the captured Japanese soldiers urging the Islanders and Japanese to come out of the caves, announcing that they would be given food and clothing if they did. But he, like others, had been cautioned by Japanese soldiers that the Americans were "fierce people" (Robert Eldukl). The Japanese had told the Islanders that if they tried to surrender, the American soldiers would hurt or kill them. They also warned, "If you try to go, *we* will kill you" (Robert Eldukl).

With such expectations it is not surprising that Islanders did not respond to this first appeal. On October 1 the Americans made a second attempt. No Japanese appeared, but six Islanders straggled out—one man, two women, and three children (81st WDHC, 1948, pp. 121–122). They were frightened and weak from malnutrition. A Chamorro man, Ramon Cabrera, headed the small group because he knew a little English. For a brief period all firing ceased as the people were rescued and taken to the 17th field hospital (81st WDHC, 1948, p. 122; Richard, 1957a, p. 612).

John Useem received word immediately and he recalls his first sight of these Islanders:

> They were terribly frightened of us. They'd been told by the Japanese that we were going to rape the women and murder the men.
>
> They were extremely hungry. Their clothes were ragged. I decided the thing we had to do first was to take care of their bodies (John Useem).

As Useem cared for these six people, those still in their caves barely moved. The war went on, 7 more days of bombardment and fighting. Grad-

ually the severity of the attacks led some people to realize that there was no hope if they stayed where they were. At noon on October 8, 87 people came out of hiding and made their way to the American troops (81st WDHC, 1948, p. 122).

Robert Eldukl, Sister Elene, and Masao Guiliberte were among them. Conditions in the caves were almost unbearable, and the American broadcasts offered food and safety. Eldukl remembers that when they finally decided to go, they planned to do it secretly, tricking the Japanese soldiers.

> There was another cave that we knew about and we told the soldiers that the cave we were staying in at the moment was safer, and . . . we suggested they could bring the soldiers here because they were getting injured and wounded . . . and we [would go] to the other cave. So we were able to do that and while we were pretending that we were on our way to the other cave, we came to the Americans.

Sister Elene realized "This is the day. We have to go!" Everyone felt it would be better to carry little in case they had to run, so Elene tied up her few belongings in an old Japanese flag. The group chose two older men who knew a little English to approach the Americans first. Once the men established it was safe, the rest of the group followed.

As the Islanders approached the enemy soldiers they were extremely frightened because the Americans looked so different from the Japanese. Sister Elene was confused to see the soldiers handing out and eating candy because in Japanese times candy was only for children. Masao Guiliberte was shocked by the size of the Americans: "Some of us were afraid because the Americans were big and it was hot and they only wore shorts. Because of the sun they were all wearing sunglasses and their skin had turned red."

The Islanders immediately became the responsibility of Lieutenant Useem. He found that within this group were not only Palauans but also Chamorros from Guam and people from Yap, Ulithi, and Sonsorol. Many had come to Angaur as employees in the Japanese-run phosphate mines. "They were all mixed up and they were terribly frightened of us. The Japanese Army had treated them as what was left over. They were thirsty, they were hungry, they were injured, they were dying" (John Useem).

Useem had to work quickly to feed, clothe, and protect the Islanders. At this time every aspect of their survival was his responsibility. Useem's language officer, Francis Mahoney, used his knowledge of Japanese to communicate with the Islanders. Discussion revealed that as many as 90 Islanders were still hiding in the caves. Three Palauans volunteered to return and convince the others that it was safe to emerge. Robert Eldukl was one

of the three. He was scared as he made his way back among the rocks. The three men had brought a small amount of food to give to the Palauans to convince them to follow. They told them they would have to escape early the next morning before the American bombardment was due to begin again.

As the sun rose Eldukl and the other two men led the rest of the Islanders out of the caves to the American camp. Many were wounded or ill and were taken directly to the hospital. The rest were taken to Useem's camp on the eastern side of Lake Aztec. At the time the group arrived, several of Useem's men were digging a hole for a latrine, and some of the Islanders looked at it with terror, believing that it would be their grave (Useem, 1945a, p. 579). Having no experience with Americans, they recalled the dire warnings of the Japanese.

The arrival of the second group brought the total number of Islanders in the camp to 183. For Useem and his men, most of each day and night was "preoccupied with the sheer physical process of living" (John Useem). Useem remembers that people were ill and dying, babies were being born, and occasional fights and disagreements were erupting between groups because of the cramped and stressful conditions. There were shortages of necessary items because no civil affairs supplies, such as construction material for living quarters, clothing, cooking equipment, and food stocks for civilian use, had been unloaded in the assault period (Richard, 1957a, p. 613). Useem had to practice "moonlight requisition" (stealing) wherever he could. Food for the Islanders was made up from K rations and remaining Japanese stocks of rice. Clothing consisted of any pieces of American and Japanese uniforms that could be secured (Useem, 1945b, p. 6). The increased number of people meant that as many as 20 had to be sheltered in pyramid tents that should have housed only 8. Some people were squeezed into crudely built shacks (Useem, 1945c, p. 93).

The Islanders, emerging from nearly a month of darkness, starvation, and fear, did not notice any lack of supplies or discomfort. For Masao Guiliberte, like many others, the contrast between the deprivation they had suffered and the large amounts of food and clothing the Americans now offered was stark. He recalls that "it seemed like we were experiencing something like heaven." The tents for the Islanders were enclosed within a fence and "Life," as Mathias Akitaya recalled, "actually began within that fence."

People rested, sometimes sleeping, sometimes sitting quietly and talking. There were children in the group, but there was "practically no move-

ment, no running about" (Useem, 1945a, p. 580). The calm of the people masked extreme stress and confusion. The ordeal was not over yet.

Useem was careful about security. Guards were posted at the perimeter of the camp day and night. Mathias recalls that military police watched over them constantly, and if anyone went anywhere, guards had to accompany the person. But most Islanders, because of illness, exhaustion, and fear, had little interest in moving beyond the confines of the camp. At night the area was blacked out and perimeter security was established (John Useem).

One evening not long after the arrival of the second group, a heavy rain shower fell. Useem had retired for the night, aware of the emotional strain most of the people were under, but not knowing where it might lead. That night, the horrors of the time in the cave, combined with fear of the Japanese, fear of the Americans, confusion over the suddenly changed circumstances, and the continuing noise and activity of combat, were too much for one Islander. In a crazed state he grabbed an adze and first attacked several Palauans before "lurching out into the perimeters of the camp" (John Useem) and killing three of Useem's men, breaking their skulls. At this point Useem was awakened by shouts. People were yelling "Japanese! Japanese!" and Useem leaped from his bed. His immediate assumption was that the camp had been invaded.

> So in this pitch black, heavy rain, with no knowledge, no language capacity, with great turmoil and confusion, everyone extremely frightened, I had to figure out what was going on. It took me until around 6:00 in the morning to learn and by then I was covered in blood. . . . Over [the next] 2 or 3 hours, I calmed the people down and got them to the point where they had some degree of security, although children were crying and they were frightened (John Useem).

Robert Eldukl remembers that night. The man who had "gone crazy" was shot during his rampage, and the Palauans were very afraid that the Americans "might kill the Palauans because of this incident" (Robert Eldukl). They knew that soldiers had been killed and wounded and, though they had no understanding of how American justice worked, they expected some kind of retaliation. Some people developed "bad feelings toward the family of the man because of the incident" (Robert Eldukl). Eldukl recalls that the Islanders planned to punish the family, "but Mahoney and Useem, the commanding officers, were able to convince them and talk them out of it" (Robert Eldukl).

In the early light of the following morning, a delegation from the man's family came to see Useem. They fell to the ground and said to him "We

are ready to die" (John Useem). Through his interpreter he asked them why they wished to die, and they explained that "Our family has been destroyed, our household has been disgraced. Our clan no longer has a name, so please kill us, whatever way you wish. We don't know how you kill in America" (John Useem).

Useem was astounded, but answered as calmly as he could: "I am an American and I am not going to kill you" (John Useem). The people began to kiss his feet and beg him to kill them. In recounting this story to me 46 years after the event, Useem was still distressed by the role the Islanders asked him to play. When they confronted him, he was confused and had to take some time to think about what he could do. After an hour he again told the Islanders that he would not kill them. They replied, "We are not persons." Although Useem had no knowledge of Palauan culture, he intuitively believed their assertion. He agonized over a solution. Finally he went over to the airfield to see whether any flights were going to Saipan and if it was possible to take the Islanders involved out of Angaur. The transfer was arranged. The other Islanders were told that the man was mentally ill and that was the reason he acted the way he did. Robert Eldukl saw that Useem had taken control of the situation and had "talked them out" of wanting punishment for the family (Robert Eldukl).

For Palauans, life in the camp was simple and complex at the same time. Food and shelter were abundant, and daily life was safer than it had been for many months; however, the Islanders still harbored a fear of Americans and of what their future was to be. Useem recalls that many people had brought a few "precious possessions" with them when they came out of the caves. One had a crucifix, another some of his grandparent's clothing. These became their "private property," which they clung to tightly. It was all that was left of their old life (John Useem).

The camp was the center of a new life. On October 23 all Japanese resistance on Angaur was declared overcome and hostilities ceased (81st WDHC, 1948, pp. 128–132; Smith, 1984, pp. 529–530). Now great improvements in living conditions could be made, and eventually the camp shifted south to a better location, a new village of 42 tents around a central kitchen area. The American flag was raised over the village on December 3, 1944 (Richard, 1957a, pp. 627–628).

For the rest of the war, Islanders on Angaur lived and worked in this village and were supervised by the American military government. The world was turned upside down. Men like Robert Eldukl, who only months before had worked for Japanese soldiers, now began to work for the American

military. Food was plentiful, housing improved greatly, and entertainment—particularly American movies and baseball games—abounded. The war was over for them.

The force that had shaped the lives and actions of the Palauans and other Islanders on Angaur was the almost unbearable suffering of many days of hiding in the caves. To survive, they chose to surrender themselves to an unknown enemy. Their immediate reactions to this enemy were determined by their experiences of suffering. As many saw it, they came out of "hell" to "heaven." The positive response of the Islanders on Angaur to the new life of plenty offered by the Americans was a direct result of their previous deprivation. In turning to the Americans for aid, the Islanders on Angaur did not turn against the Japanese. Many maintained a concern for their former administrators.

WAR ON BABELDAOB

On "bypassed" Babeldaob, the situation was markedly different.[3] There was no invasion: The war unfolded there as a prolonged air attack. Every day the people on Angaur could see heavy bombers taking off from the strip on Angaur and fighter planes taking off from Peleliu, all heading north in the direction of Babeldaob. Many wondered what hope there could be for their relatives there.

The taking of Peleliu and Angaur brought war into the heart of Palau. As these southern battlefields were transformed into American bases, the bypassed islands of Koror and Babeldaob were patrolled and "neutralized" more regularly and more intensely. The main island of Koror had been evacuated of most of its population during August and September when the frequency of air strikes increased with the invasions in the south. Approximately 6,000 Islanders on Babeldaob[4] shared the island with an estimated 37,000 Japanese troops (Richard, 1957b, p. 18; VMF 122), government officials, and civilians, many of whom now worked for the military. The Japanese military command and the civilian administration established government and organizational centers, primarily in Ngatpang, Aimeliik, and Airai (see map). Other troops were scattered across Babeldaob, taking over Palauan villages (interviews with Palauans, 1990; MAG 11; VMF 121; VMF 122). Islanders moved into the jungle, to *hinanba* 'places of refuge.' Ngeremlengui and Ngaraard received most of the evacuees from Peleliu and Angaur. The majority of these people found a place to stay with relatives

in jungle hinanba. Although the Japanese ordered the Islanders to take refuge away from the military camps, given the large number of troops occupying the relatively small island of Babeldaob, they were always close to *some* concentration of Japanese. In addition, some lived closer to Japanese camps because they worked for the soldiers. Although many Palauans remained in the same province throughout the war, others moved back and forth, mainly to search for and transport food or to establish and work on new farms. Most of this movement occurred at the instigation of the Japanese military.

For the Palauans on Babeldaob, relations with the Japanese often constituted the crux of the process of survival.[5] The Islanders who had stayed on Angaur during the American invasion had been in contact with the Japanese, but their daily life was not tied to their relationship with the soldiers. On Babeldaob, however, the degree to which Palauans suffered from the two main dangers—famine and air attacks—was to a large extent determined by the demands of the Japanese soldiers. Palauans suffered malnutrition as a direct result of Japanese seizure of their farms and other food supplies. Other Islanders died or were injured in air attacks because they were out in the open, farming or fishing for the Japanese.[6] The Palauans on Babeldaob, still under the administration of Japan, were forced to obey the orders of their occupiers, even when it endangered their lives.

Palauans remember that the planes came every day, both during daylight and at night. The war diary of the Peleliu-based Marine Aircraft Group Eleven (MAG 11) and the existing diaries of the squadrons operating under its command [VMF 121; VMF 122; VMF (N) 541; VMTB 134] corroborate Palauan memories of air attacks on Babeldaob. Operations were canceled only when the weather was so poor that targets were invisible through the thick cloud and rain or when the wind was too hazardous for flying. From October 1944 until early April 1945, the number of sorties over Babeldaob increased steadily. In October, 600 sorties were made across the island to drop bombs or to strafe or napalm numerous targets. The number of planes involved in each daylight raid ranged between 2 and 48. Total sorties for the month of February 1945 doubled the previous October figure when 1,205 planes swept across Babeldaob.

The raids varied in focus. There were general bombing and strafing sweeps over the entire island and there were raids specifically designed to pick out and destroy Japanese transport barges and other surface vessels. These were conducted at regular intervals throughout the day. During daily combat air patrols, four Corsairs patrolled for 2 hours at a time as pilots sought out enemy targets—buildings of all kinds, boats, trucks, storage fa-

cilities, gun positions, and any personnel out in open view. Other bomb strikes were aimed at particular targets or concentrated on one area of Babeldaob, usually a sector known to be heavily populated by Japanese troops or the site of enemy storage facilities, radio installations, or anti-aircraft batteries. They could occur at any time of day, but were usually scheduled for early morning or late afternoon. During the hours of darkness, night fighters struck at assigned targets and then harassed and heckled Koror and Babeldaob with bombs and bullets (MAG 11). Every day and night, fighters patrolled the land and sea "hunting"[7] for targets, and a squadron of torpedo bombers sought out enemy submarines. After completing assigned strikes, the pilots flew over the island to home base, seeking out and strafing "targets of opportunity"[8] along the route (MAG 11).

Although the American squadrons carried out several forms of air attack on the northern Palau Islands, the Palauans themselves were generally not aware of these differences. They did not distinguish between being strafed by aircraft on a barge sweep and being shot at by planes on combat air patrol. They did, however, recognize that Japanese facilities and personnel were major targets, and they became aware of which activities put them most at risk. Everyone learned the general routine of the regular patrols—morning and afternoon—but they also realized there were other unscheduled attacks. They often had no choice about risking dangerous situations if they were under Japanese orders. Depending on where they took refuge and what work they did for the Japanese, Islanders were forced into different degrees of danger. Fishermen were at particular risk from barge sweeps, people living or working near Japanese encampments from strikes on Japanese troops, and those laboring on farms from napalm strikes on gardens.

For Palauans and Japanese alike, the intensity and frequency of the air attacks severely limited daily life. Bombing and strafing caused injury and death and destroyed food supplies, bringing about starvation and disease. Strikes were sometimes made against gardens and farms for the specific purposes of destroying food supplies, exacerbating food shortages, and weakening the Japanese. The raids continued for almost a year, from September 1944 right up to a final raid on the last day of the war on August 15, 1945. Japanese–Islander relations declined rapidly, and one Palauan described this environment thus: "One year is a long time. One day is long, very long" (Fumio Rengiil, b. 1917).

In contrast to Angaur, the wartime experiences of the people on Babeldaob involved more people in many different situations. In addition to the bombing and famine, laboring, carrying, and farming for the soldiers and

Japanese callousness and maltreatment were experienced in interconnected ways. People suffered more or less from each of these depending on who they were, their age and sex, where they had taken refuge, and whether they were forced to work for the soldiers.

In 1944 Wilhelm Rengiil was a 15-year-old boy attending the Vocational School in Koror. As a student he was immediately drafted by the Japanese to work at a variety of tasks. Initially he was posted to Airai to boil water day after day to extract salt for the soldiers. Wilhelm recalls that the planes came over regularly and that he would rush into the safety of a nearby cave when they fired. Later he was ordered to help transport supplies across the channel between Koror and Babeldaob. Each night the barges were brought out from camouflaged hiding places, and Wilhelm would meet the soldiers around 8 o'clock when it was dark. It was while helping with this job that Wilhelm narrowly survived an air attack. One evening a plane suddenly appeared overhead and fired at the barge. He and the other Islanders reacted quickly by diving straight into the water and swimming to safety. In contrast, many of the Japanese soldiers did not respond fast enough. When Wilhelm returned the next morning, eight bodies were still with the barge. The vessel was covered with blood, the bodies badly burned.

During early 1945 when the number of attacks over Babeldaob increased, Wilhelm fled with his family to a hideout in the jungle where they stayed for nearly 3 months. Wilhelm believes he survived only because of this cave: "Every day from Peleliu, there would be a dozen, sometimes a dozen to 18 planes dropping bombs all over." He, his father, and his brother left the cave to fish and farm at night or in the very early morning when there were few or no planes. They learned over time that "at least 10 to 15 small, one-pilot warplanes came and did a routine checkup patrol every day. So . . . during the daytime we slept and in the evening we worked on the farm and planted crops."

Direou Orrukei, in refuge at Melekeok, remembers that "We were like animals, because at night we would cook our food and [work in the] garden because the soldiers said they did not want to see any smoke or fire during the daytime . . . so we did everything at night."

Despite the dangers, Rose Kebekol (b. 1922) often went out of her cave in Aimeliik during the daytime. She had to search for whatever food she could get because she was caring for her parents and her own two young children. She recalls: "We would watch for when the planes went away and then we would run outside and go looking for food. If they came back we would hide ourselves underneath the bushes." On one occasion, however, a

bomb landed within about 60 m (200 ft) of her, and she felt lucky that she was not injured. Others were not as fortunate. Rose remembers reacting with horror as she watched planes shoot "firelike things" right into a cave just below her own. A man inside was killed outright and a woman ran out screaming.

Another woman, an evacuee from Peleliu to Ngaraard, remembers that while she was out in the open, "I looked up and I saw this bomb coming down. So I ran a couple of feet to hide myself because I didn't know what it would do. I watched it and it came down, but it didn't explode." Bombs that did not explode were not harmless. Many of the bombs used by the Americans had delayed fuses and therefore exploded some time after impact (MAG 11).

Men who were fishing were in the greatest danger because pilots would sweep low over the shoreline seeking out boats. When planes appeared, the men jumped into the water and held themselves underneath by hanging onto rocks, waiting until the planes left. At low tide there was not even the protection of the water (Jonathon Emul, b. 1927).

The continuous air raids made it dangerous to go out to collect food. The destruction of gardens and farms forced many Palauans to exist on roots, leaves, fruits of the mangroves, small crabs, and shrimp. Some of the foods they collected were almost inedible. Rose Adelbai, like many others, remembers having to soak a bitter poisonous fruit for days before it could be eaten safely.[9] Today many Palauans are embarrassed or angry at how poor they became during the war (Mongami Kelmal, b. 1926; Woman, Ngermid, b. 1922). Alfonso Oiterong (b. 1924) remembers with sadness that

> in those days it became sort of natural to see a child lying there, alive, but unable to move, because it was starving. . . . We would see a mother holding a baby and the baby was breathing, the mother was dead. That kind of thing became common and we couldn't do anything. We ourselves were starving.

The Japanese soldiers reacted to the starvation and the incessant air raids by forcing Islanders to work harder to provide food for the soldiers. In desperation the Japanese claimed all farms for themselves and forced the Palauans to make new farms solely for Japanese use.

> The Japanese would tell us to make gardens or farms. The parents were supposed to make the farms for the soldiers. The father of the house would have to make the biggest farm and the mother a smaller one. One farm per head for the soldiers. Even if you had a 3-year-old,

> he would have to have a farm right there for the soldiers. So five members of the family would have to make five farms (Rose Adelbai).

The food was "only for the soldiers" (Rose Adelbai). The family was not allowed to take anything. When they were permitted to collect from their farms, it was under strict rules and observation. Direou Orrukei recalls that people were allowed to collect food only at night, under guard.

> The soldiers [would] accompany us for about 30 minutes to the taro patch. . . . It was very dark and we couldn't see anything. If you wanted to get a taro, you would just stick your hand in and feel the taro and try to use a knife to cut it and not cut yourself. And then for 30 minutes the soldiers would be watching and we would be trying to get as much as we could in that time. . . . That was the only way we could get food.

When people planted new farms for their own use, the Japanese military invariably moved in and took them too. Many Islanders had no option but to steal from their own land. Others were too frightened to touch anything, fearing Japanese retribution. Tibedakl Olblai (b. 1917) was forced to farm for the Japanese, but she remembers "that was not enough" for the soldiers; they would "even steal farms from us, our own personal ones, and when we went to take crops from our own farms, they would beat us."

In addition to working on farms, Palauan women were often conscripted to carry food supplies from one area to another. Obechou Delutaoch, then 27 years old, remembers that once a month the soldiers drafted her and several other women to carry goods from Ngaraard to other military units stationed in Ngardmau, a distance of about 16 km.

> We would have to walk all the way to Ngardmau to deliver the food for the soldiers and then go home. I had no idea how far it was because at the time there was no particular path. We would have to climb hills, go over, go under. At the same time we had to make sure that the food was not going to get spoiled. When we went in the evening, we had to hurry before daytime came because the planes would start coming. If we did not reach Ngardmau before daylight came, we would have to find a place to stay and wait the whole day for the shooting and everything to clear and then at 4 or 5 o'clock we would have to journey on.

Obechou recalls that earlier in the war the Japanese warned Palauans not to go out in the open during daytime because doing so would make them clear targets for American planes; however, as the soldiers became more

desperate in their quest for food, they became much less concerned about the safety of the Palauans.

On Babeldaob many people turned against the Japanese military because of their callousness. Some even used quiet strategies of resistance and retaliation. Mereb Eruang, employed to fish for the Japanese, would steal from his catch to provide food for his family before he turned the remaining fish over to the Japanese. Dengelei Saburo (b. 1930) protected her tapioca crop by cutting off the exposed stems above the ground so that the plants were hidden beneath. Anthony Polloi's family planted poisonous tapioca between the edible tapioca plants or around the perimeter of the garden so that the soldiers would become ill when they stole and ate them. In such ways Palauans were able to use the ignorance of the Japanese against them, tricking the soldiers and protecting themselves. Harsh treatment by the Japanese, coupled with a widespread rumor (mentioned by nearly every Palauan I interviewed) that the Japanese planned to kill all the Palauans by blowing them up in a cave at Ngatpang, turned many Palauans on Babeldaob against the Japanese. Some were angered into retaliation, others frightened into submission.

The Japanese made some effort to heal the rift between the military and the Palauans by appointing an officer, Captain Yoshiyasu Morikawa, to oversee and take responsibility for organizing Palauans, particularly in the area of food production (Higuchi, 1991, pp. 149–156). In contrast to their negative assessment of the attitudes of many Japanese soldiers, Palauans saw Morikawa's concern for their welfare as unusual. A powerful myth developed around the figure of Morikawa, the crux of which was the belief that this young and handsome officer was an American spy (Higuchi, 1991, p. 149; Walter, 1993, pp. 163–172). In turning from the cruelty of the Japanese, some Palauans began to believe in an opposite, mirror image of the good Americans who could save them. This conception decided a man called Joseph Tellei to lead a group of Islanders from Babeldaob to the southern islands in December 1944 to seek freedom and safety with their American "enemies" (Higuchi, 1986).

CONCLUSION

Islanders on Angaur and Babeldaob experienced World War II in different ways. The small number who remained on Angaur suffered through a short

but intense period of battle. Despite the horror of the weeks in the caves, they retained a close relationship with the Japanese because they could see that the soldiers were not directly responsible for their suffering. The people on Angaur chose to surrender themselves to the Americans to ensure their own survival. They then experienced the rest of the war as mostly a time of plenty. Peace and reconstruction began early because the southern islands were rapidly transformed into American air bases (see Walter, 1993). In contrast, on Babeldaob, Palauans lived through a long year of continuous suffering that was intensified by Japanese actions—their recruitment of labor, seizure of farms, and callous treatment of the Islanders. A deep split therefore developed between the Babeldaob Palauans and the Japanese.

Different experiences of war influenced the ways in which Palauans adapted to the new world of American administration that came with the end of the war.[10] With the coming of American occupation forces, Islanders on Babeldaob, like those on Angaur, emerged from the "hell" of war into a "heaven" of plenty. The whole of Palau had suffered the physical devastation of war, but by August 1945 Angaur and Peleliu had been under American military government for almost a year and had experienced material development in the form of new roads, new housing, and jobs. But Babeldaob had just emerged from the ravages of the war in August 1945, and the healing of the land and the people had only just begun. In terms of physical reconstruction and adaptation to American ways, conditions in the south were well in advance of those on Babeldaob.

After the Japanese surrender on August 15, 1945, American planes continued to fly out of the morning sun and pass over the airstrip at Airai and across Babeldaob and Koror, but during these daily reconnaissance patrols they never fired their weapons. Palauans gradually began to realize that they no longer needed to fear the planes. Eight-year-old Anthony Polloi was happy that he could now go out in the open. One day, however, he stopped suddenly when he saw two soldiers with guns. They were not Japanese. He was frightened, but also curious because on the top of one man's head he saw a striking halo of blond hair. Before the war, Anthony had attended catechism classes arranged by the local Catholic priest, and there he had seen pictures of the Archangel Gabriel, with flowing blond locks. He stared at the blond soldier and then quickly turned and ran as fast as he could back to his mother, shouting at her with excitement, "I've seen an angel! I've seen an angel!"

The new world of peace heralded by Anthony's "angel" was to bring about many new problems and contradictions for Palauans. The different experiences in the north and south of peace and reconstruction were also to influence Palau's next journey, through the American naval administration in the period 1945 through 1951 (see Walter, 1993, pp. 237–335).

Correspondence about this article and requests for reprints may be addressed to Karen R. George, 'Historically Speaking,' 36 Princes Avenue, Crafers West, 5152, South Australia.

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Notes

1. The expression "D-Day" is used throughout military literature to refer to the day selected for the start of an operation. It does not refer only to the Allied invasion of Europe on June 6, 1944.

2. Quotations with this source, (John Useem), are derived from my series of interviews with Useem on July 5–7, 1990.

3. "Bypassed" is military terminology for areas that are not directly invaded by troops but are neutralized through bombing and other means.

4. After the Japanese surrender in August 1945, 5,350 Islanders came under American control (Island Command Peleliu). This figure includes the 183 Islanders on Angaur. Using Japanese documents, Tadao Yanaihara (1940, p. 30) recorded the 1937 population as 6,360.

5. In the following discussions of relations between Palauans and Japanese, I am referring primarily to relationships with the Japanese military.

6. A comparison of Yanaihara's (1940, p. 30) 1937 population figure for Palau of 6,360 and the postwar American figure of 5,350, minus the 183 Islanders on Angaur, reveals that approximately 1,000 Islanders died as a result of starvation or bombing during the war.

7. "Hunting" for targets is the terminology used throughout squadron war diaries.

8. "Targets of opportunity" is a term used throughout squadron war diaries.

9. This fruit is referred to by Palauans as *denges* or *belloi* and is the fruit of the oriental mangrove (see Nero, 1989, p. 145).

10. For an anthropological perspective on the meaning of the war to Palauans, see Nero (1989).

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