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## Document 1566C

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# Which Marshall Islands were visited by the Pericón expedition?

## Identification according to Coello

*Source: Francisco Coello, "Conflicto Hispano-Alemán", Boletín de la Sociedad Geográfica de Madrid, vol. 19, numbers 5 & 6, Nov-Dec 1885, pp. 291-293.*

### Islands discovered by the ship San Gerónimo in 1566.

[1.] On the 23th of June, while sailing between 9° and 10° N, when they thought they were nearing the Barbudos, they believed they saw land but they only sighted them on the 29th. They were 17 low islets, the biggest one hardly having half a league in circumference, and a few not one crossbow shot across; they were united one to another, like a rosary, by reefs that appeared at low tide, and one could walk over them. They seemed to be uninhabited and, although fertile and with trees, they had to lack water. They did not land on any of them. **They may be those of the Kaven or Maloelap Group, or else those of the Eregup or Erikub Group**, probably those of the second group that is found in 9° to 10°. Perhaps those they had seen before had been from the first group, although they had passed them six days before already and the distance is short.

[2.] On the 1st of July, they arrived at another range of islands with over 20 islands, bigger and smaller, which were populated. They went to anchor at them. On the 2nd, they stepped ashore at the last island but did not find water. **It seems probable that these belong to the Namu and Lileb Group, and the island mentioned is probably that of the northwest part of Kuayalein.**

[3.] On the 3rd, they met with another chain of islands, similar to those behind, and they went to the last one, where they anchored. They saw 10 Indians with their body tattooed and their hair long. The women were brown, well shaped and lovely. They were peaceful people, and they staged some dances at the beat of a drum. They had good houses, tools of bone and shell, and their food was coconuts, bananas and yams.

**They must be the islands named Arrecifes on the old maps<sup>1</sup>, and Ujilong by the natives**, in accordance with the course they were following, as they say that although they wished to go up to 13° they could not go up by more than 40'.

[4.] On the night of the 6th they saw themselves surrounded on all sides by islands and they were overwhelmed by their proximity, so they entered, by a channel between two islands less than a stone throw from each other, into a big and clean bay, enclosed by many small islands and reefs. They say that they were in 9° and 2/3, and that the nearest islet was about half a league in circumference; it was flat and fertile, with palm trees. They found there four houses and fishing grounds, but no people, although there were some in the other islands. The natives had ships with round sails. They visited some of the other islands of the group, and on the 21st of July they departed by a channel on the western<sup>2</sup> side, leaving many other islets on either side [of the pass]. Here were marooned the pilot Lope Martín with 13 soldiers and as many sailors.

The narrative mentions that they arrived at this group after having covered a good 100 leagues from the previous one, and according to the description and the latitude, **the group that appears to correspond the best is that of Namonuito**, although its greatest latitude is only 9° and it is about 200 leagues from that of Uyilong. It could also be that of the Dunkin Reef, which is nearer and in a greater latitude, because many believe it is a group of islands named Orolong and little known.<sup>3</sup> The Mercator atlases (numbers 44 and 46) place south of the Marianas an island named Martin Island, and I do not know if it was to record that event; others, such as Samson's (n° 55), the *Nep-tune François* (n° 60), and that of Ablancourt (n° 66), call them the island of San Martin. They all locate it next to another [group] called *Aves* or *des Oiseaux* [Bird Is.] and close to the equator, with the peculiar fact that the last three show at one place the islands of San Martin and *des Oiseaux*, and at another nearby place, those of the Martyrs and *des Oiseaux* or *Aves*, an obvious duplication.<sup>4</sup>

[5.] On the 13th of September, and after touching at Guan [sic] in the Marianas, and having suffered from strong storms, they found themselves before an island that the pilot thought to be the same as the previous one [i.e. Guam], but it seemed to have twice its size, something like at least 70 leagues in circumference, with plains and mountains; they remained near it for two days without being able to touch at it on account of the winds. **It must be the islands of the Peliu Group** that has in fact such a circumference, if one includes the reefs and shoals that encircle them and which, at a certain distance, could appear like a single island.

1 Ed. note: I have sufficiently established in Vol. 1 that Arrecifes was Ulithi, and no other group.

2 Ed. note: He assumed that they exited by a western pass, but the direction of that pass is not so specified in the text.

3 Ed. note: It is amazing the confusion that still existed in the cartography of the Pacific as late as 1885. By the way, Orolong is an islet of the Palau Group near which Captain Wilson was shipwrecked in 1783.

4 Ed. note: My opinion is that cartographers wrote Martin, and San Martin, instead of Martyr Is. [the Pulap of Capt. Arellano], and Bird Is., the Jemo of Legazpi.

## Identification according to Sharp

*Source: Andrew Sharp, The Discovery of the Pacific Islands, Oxford, 1969, pp. 40-42.*

[4.] The only feasible identification of the atoll at which Lope Martin and his companions were left is **Ujelang**, the detached westernmost atoll of the Marshalls. Its latitude is 9-2/3 degrees, there is a narrow and a wide passage in its south side, and it is the only island in such a position that a sailing time of 14 days to Guam and Rota and 4 days from a number of islands to the east in the neighbourhood of 9 degrees is of any significance. Legaspi's expedition had thought that Ujelang was deserted when they visited it in 1565, but only a few islanders were found by the San Jeronimo. Saavedra discovered Ujelang.

[3.] The previous island at which the landing was made and water and supplies procured in exchange for gifts, thought to be some 40 minutes to the south of Ujelang and 100 leagues distant, and described as a large atoll, must have been **in the Ujae-Kwajalein-Namu sector** of the Marshalls. When, 2 years later, Mendaña in 1568 came to an atoll which was undoubtedly **Namu**, a landing party found a chisel made from a nail and some rope. Much the most feasible explanation of these is that they were some of the gifts made by the people of the San Jeronimo at the island at which the landing was made, but this cannot be assumed as certain, since Villalobos' expedition had possibly stayed at the nearby Kwajalein in 1542.<sup>1</sup> The Pacific Islands Pilot says that a good landing can be made on the west side of Namu islet, the north-westernmost islet of Namu Atoll.

[2.] If Namu was the islet in question, then the islands seen on 1 July, the last of which was landed upon on 2 July by the soldiers who searched for water, must have been those of **Jabwot and Ailinglapalap**, two closely contiguous atolls some 20 to 25 miles east and south-east of Namu, which do in fact comprise a number of larger and smaller islands.

[1.] The islands seen on 29 June, described as a chain of twenty islands<sup>2</sup> in 9 and 10 degrees, and uninviting, **probably fit Erikub best, but could fit Maloelap to the south of it, or Wotje or Likiep to the north**. It would not be an obstacle to these tentative identifications that Jabwot and Ailinglapalap are south of 9 to 10 degrees, because Lope Martin himself, when with Arellano in the San Lucas the previous year, had struck to the south-west from Likiep to Kwajalein and Lib, and therefore knew there were fertile islands in those latitudes. It is not, however, possible to identify precisely the islands in the Marshalls which were encountered by the San Jeronimo, apart from Ujelang. Since all the Marshalls atolls from 8 to 11 degrees had been already discovered with the possible exception of Maloelap, Erikub, Wotje, Lae, Ujae, Jabwot, Ailingla-

1 Ed. note: In Vol. 1, Documents 1542 sub-series, I have demonstrated that Villalobos visited Wotje, Likiep and Wotho, and not Kwajalein.

2 Ed. note: This may be a small point, but the first group was described as composed of 17 islets; it was the second group that had 20.

palap, and Namu, the possibilities in reference to the San Jeronimo can be summed up by saying that any of these may have been discovered on this voyage...

From Rota the San Jeronimo set out for Legaspi's camp in the Philippines. The ship struck very bad weather, being driven back several times. On one of these enforced retreats it came in sight of an island with high peaks which the pilot considered to be Guam, because it was in the right latitude. Some of the ship's company, says Martinez, thought it was too big for Guam and that it might be some island between Guam and the Philippines. Since no such island exists, and since the description and the latitude agree with Guam, the pilot's identification was no doubt correct.

## Discussion about the probable tracks of the San Jerónimo

First of all, Martinez gives few latitudes and they may not always be reliable. For instance, when he says soon after leaving Acapulco that "we let ourselves fall towards the equinoctial line to less than 9° where we met great calms" he is obviously wrong, because they had not yet reached the position of Clipperton Island, at 10°. We may, however, interpret his comment to mean that they intended, and did, go down to less than 9°. Another reason for thinking this possible is that the pilot had the previous year crossed Micronesia at relatively low latitudes. In 1566, his pricking route chart indicated his own and other discoveries made by Legazpi and Villalobos. There is a very good chance also that Lope Martín steered the ship to go through Kwajalein once again. When the ship landed at the last island of a group, it may have been the same islet visited by the pilot the year before, although Martinez does not mention it. Another point to be made about the possible crossing of the Marshalls at latitudes of "9 to 10 degrees" is that Martinez did not say they did, but only that the would-be pilot Delangle said that the navigation to the west would be easy, if one would place the ship at such latitudes and run.

Secondly, working backward from the fourth "known" island, as Sharp has done, is the right approach in this case. By the way, the approach taken by Coello is mere speculation and his bad maps led him to make false conclusions about the identification of the islands visited in 1566. I am not at all sure, however, that the "known" island ought to be Ujelang. I was first led to doubt this possible identification when I looked at a map of Ujelang and saw the impossibility today of a large ship (300-400 tons) crossing over the reef safely, even at high tide. There just isn't any narrow pass on the eastern side of Ujelang, and no inner islet at the exit of this small pass. But **when one looks at a map of Enewetak while re-reading the text, every physical description throughout the narrative fits this atoll better than Ujelang**, except for one point having to do with the given latitude. Here too, Martinez may have been in error, but I think the error may have been made by copyists. I have pointed out in a footnote of the previous document that "doze" may have been erroneously transcribed

“diez”, resulting in a latitude of  $10^{\circ}$  less  $\frac{1}{3}$ , rather than  $12^{\circ}$  less  $\frac{1}{3}$  which is the latitude of Enewetak.

While retaining the possibility of Ujelang as a candidate for atoll n° 4, I have sketched some possible tracks, two of which are studied in more details in the accompanying diagrams: (1) if Enewetak was atoll n° 4, then the most likely route was via Erikub, Kwajalein, and Wotho; (2) if Ujelang was n° 4, unlike Sharp, I would opt for a track via Aur, Namu, and Kwajalein. In any case, the group most likely visited by pilot Martín in 1566 is Kwajalein, the largest in the group and one known to him; in other words, it was one atoll he could not possibly have missed had he wanted to visit it once more.

Let us review the given features of atoll n° 4 and see if they apply better to Ujelang or to Enewetak. Unfortunately, the number of islets and the circumference of the atoll are not given; so, these are neutral points of comparison for now.

Point 1.—The likely heading that night was WNW. When they perceived themselves to be “surrounded by islands on all sides”, this fits Enewetak better; they would have met a line of islands at right angle to their track, whereas at Ujelang, the atoll is narrow and would have been parallel to their line of travel.

Point 2.—Lara grabbed the tiller and pointed the ship to a narrow pass between two islets. As Sharp has pointed out, Ujelang has only two passes, on the south side, and it would be awkward to think that they coasted the island for a while before entering the first pass, and there is no islet on the left side of this pass, only a bare reef. Unless the reef structure has changed considerably in the last 4 centuries, to the extent that a pass that might have existed on the east side has since disappeared; that seems too farfetched to consider. On the other hand, there is no such problem with Enewetak; the pass is now about a mile in width, although the narrator may have exaggerated the truth a little, making his story more dramatic by saying that the pass was much narrower.

Point 3.—The pass through which the ship entered the lagoon was “between one island and another **inside**”. I could not understand this very well until I looked at the map of Enewetak; islet #33 indeed lies inside the line of the reef and is out of alignment with it. Now the distance of a stone’s throw between this islet and another may refer to the much narrower distance between #33 and #32 on the map. As for Ujelang, one cannot easily see an inside islet anywhere, unless a narrow pass existed in the past among the islets on the NE side, an unlikely situation.

Point 4.—When morning came, they saw that the nearest islet was “almost half a league in circumference” and had 4 houses, etc. and had “at least 150 palm trees there”. An elongated islet measuring 2 miles in circumference would be about 1 mile in length. That would fit islet #34 of Enewetak to a tee, whereas two likely candidates at Ujelang, islets #27 and #23, are both half that size, and would pose other difficulties (south side entry or over the reef entry, no islet on the left-hand side of the pass).

Point 5.—The day after some native proas came and went, the boat was taken to a distant islet of the atoll “about 5 leagues away”, that is 18.5 statute miles, where the natives had been building a large canoe; therefore, this islet must have been big enough to have had some large trees, whether or not it was inhabited full time.

## TWO SETS OF ATOLLS FROM AMONG THE MANY POSSIBLE ATOLLS VISITED

## Fourth atoll

6-21 July 1566

- ? islets
- small pass on East side
- wide pass to get out.

3-1/2 days  
100 leagues  
6° plus

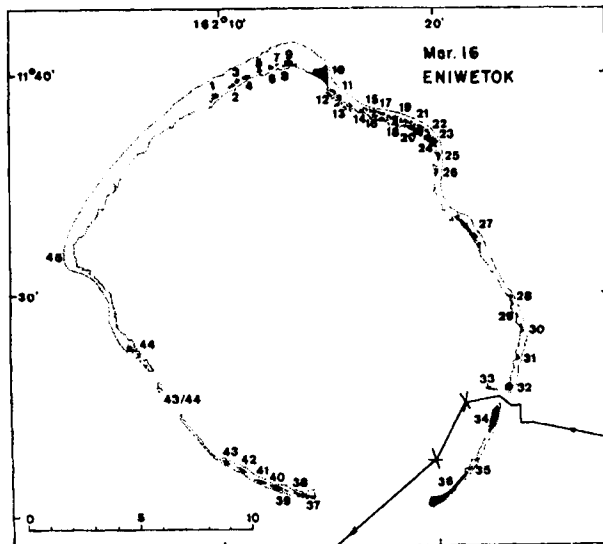
## Third atoll

3 July (10 a.m.-5 p.m.)

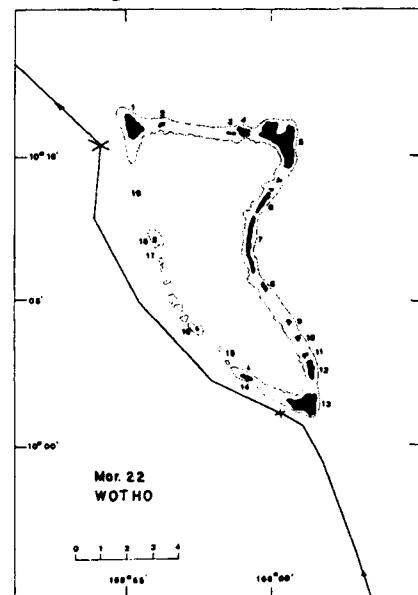
- ? islets
- populated
- water available
- no fear in natives.

1 day  
or less  
2° or less

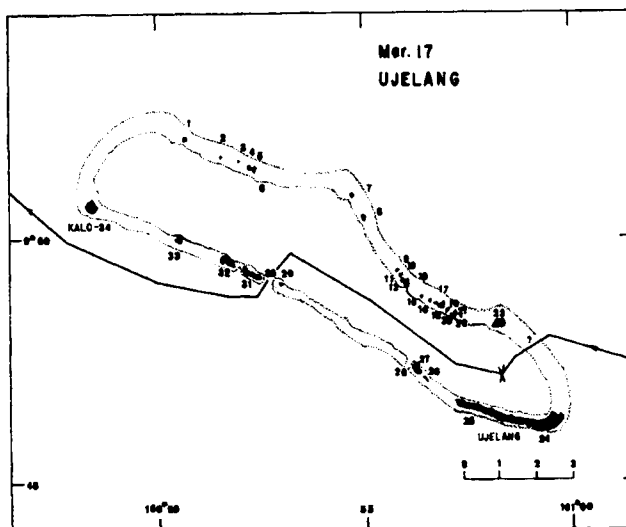
## 1) If 11°40'N, then ENEWETAK,



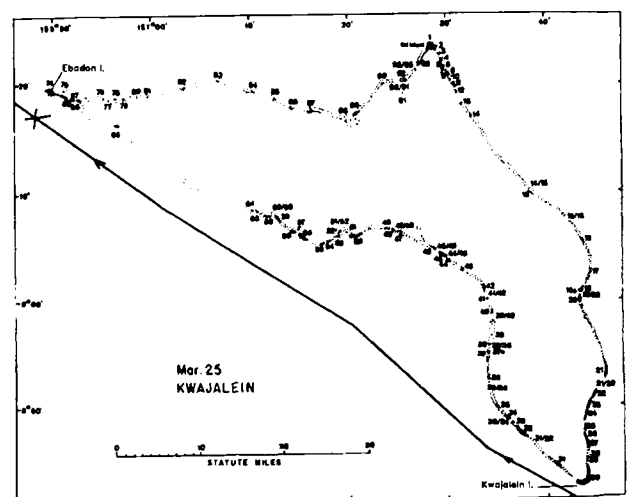
## coming from WOTHO,



## 2) If 9°40'N, then UJELANG,



## coming from KWAJALEIN,



## BY THE MUTINEERS OF THE SAN JERONIMO IN 1566.



Second atoll

1-2 July

- over 20 islets
- populated, little water
- stopped at last islet
- many flies.



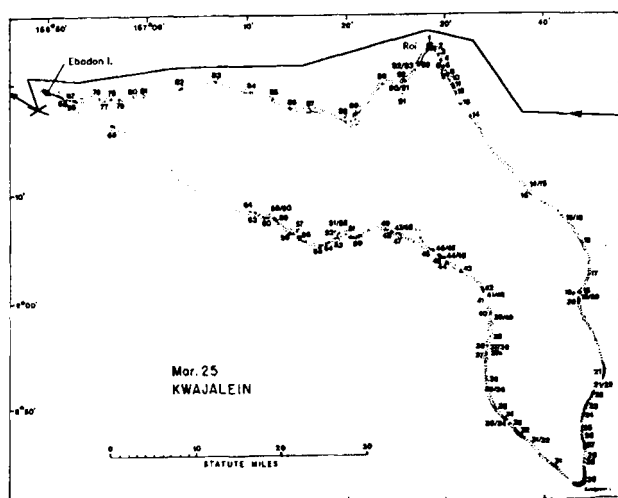
First atoll

29 June 1566

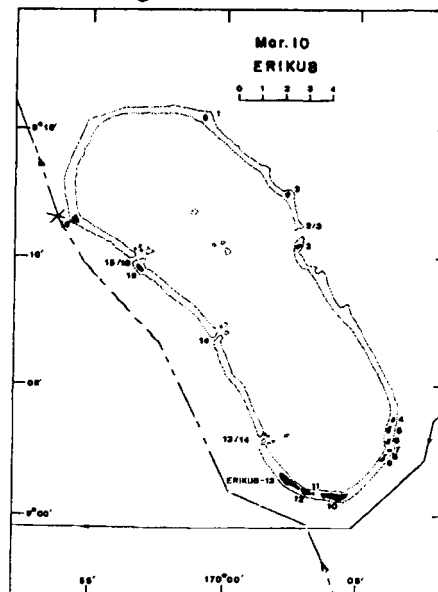
- up to 17 islets
- uninhabited
- hove to overnight?

2 days  
or less  
4° or less

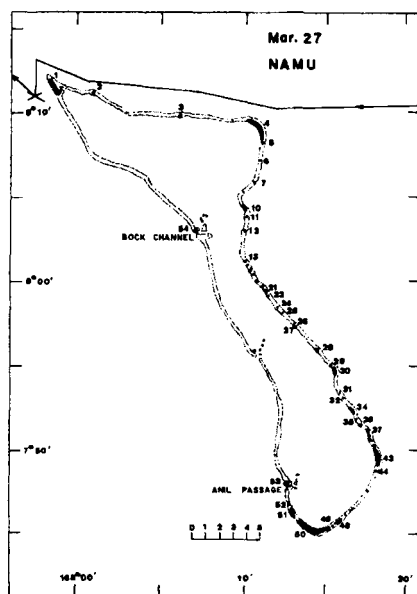
coming from KWAJALEIN,



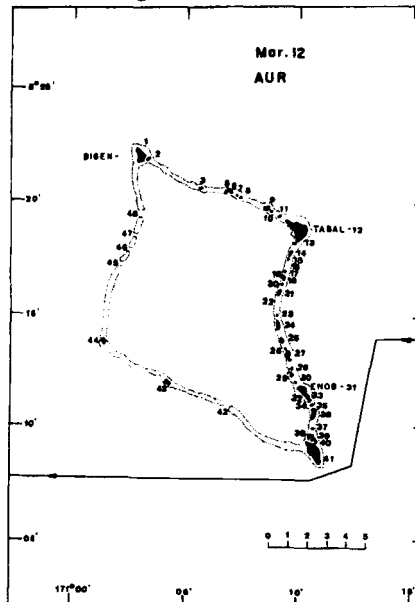
coming from ERIKUB.

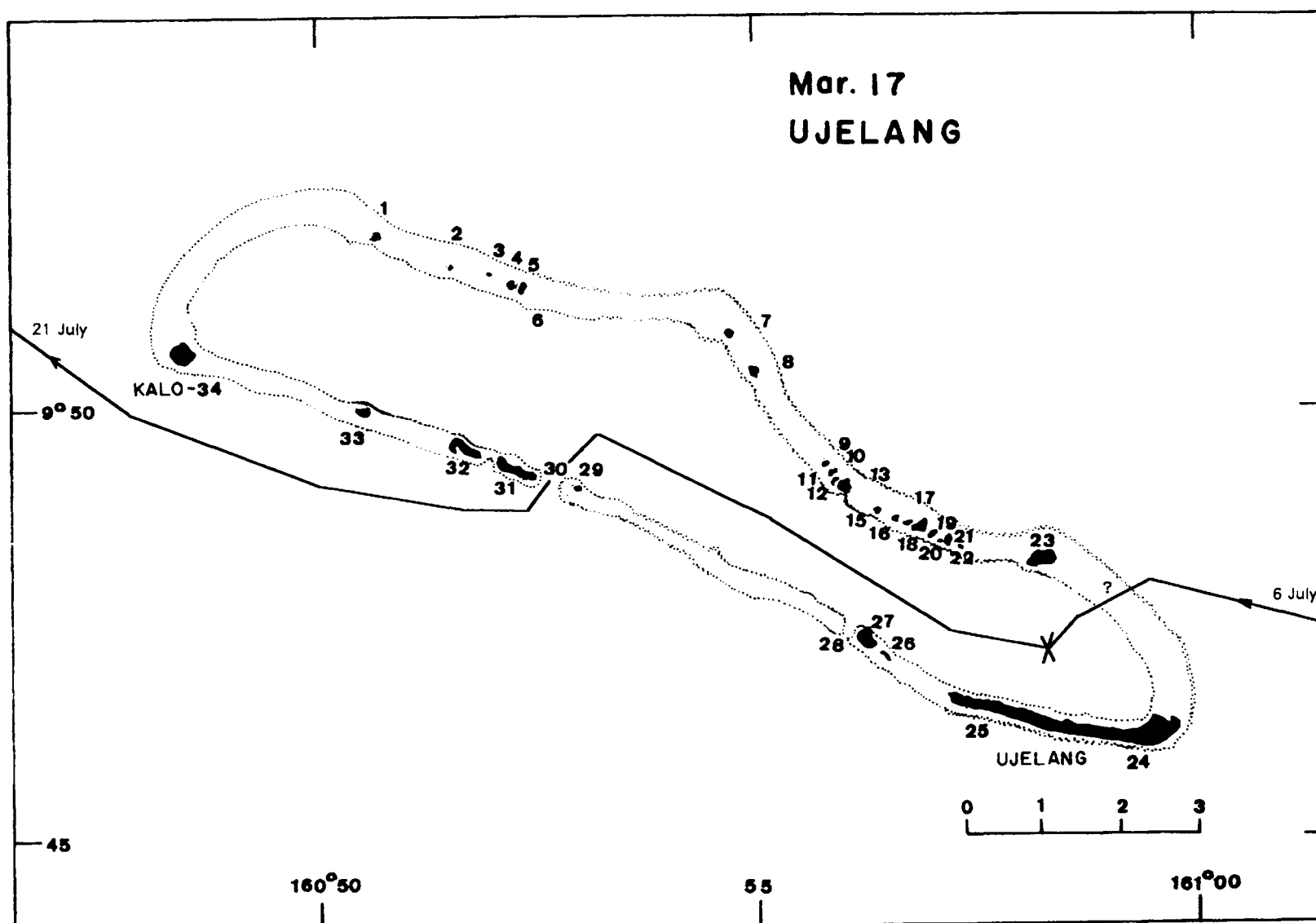


coming from NAMU,

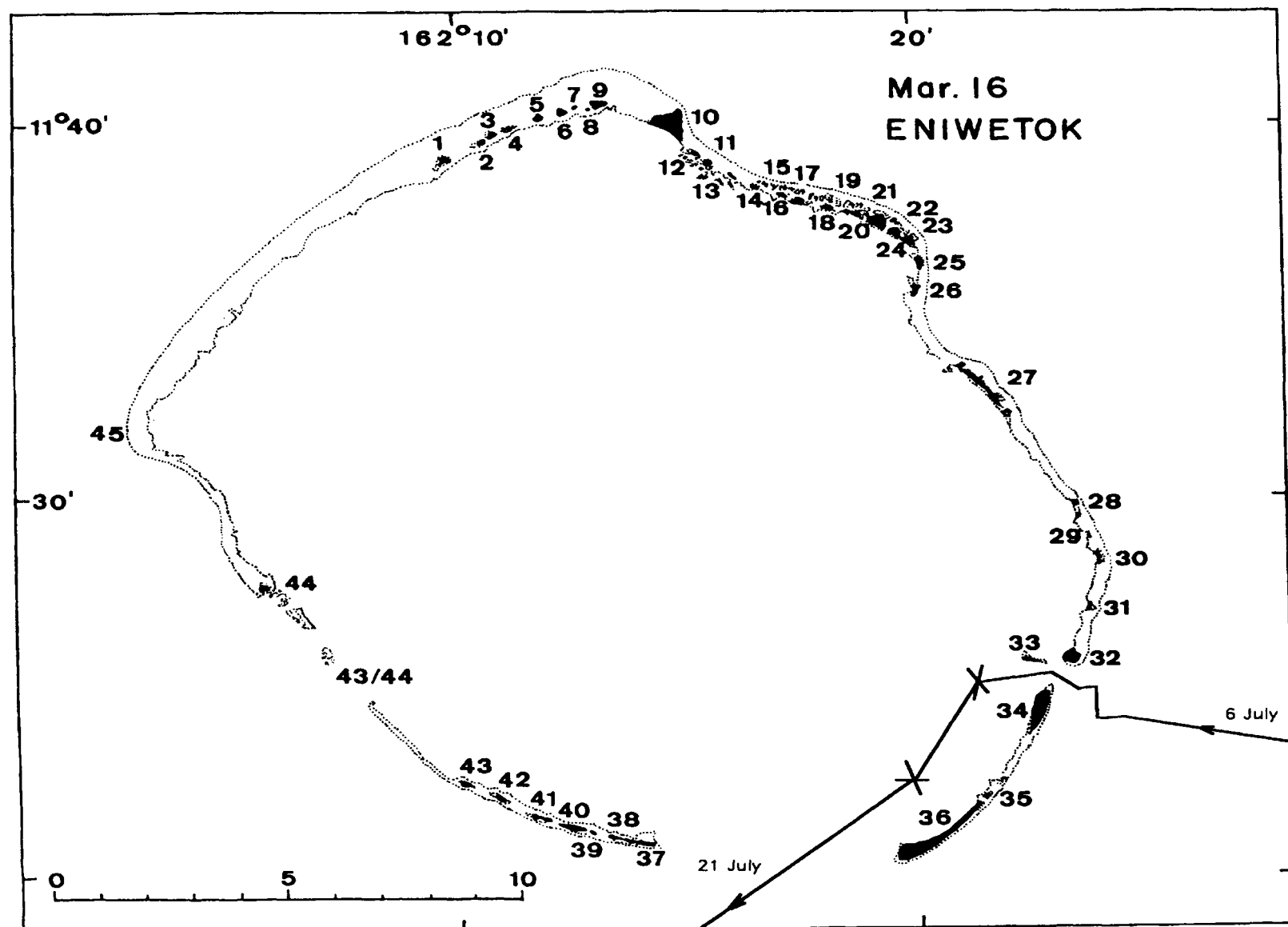


coming from AUR.









On Ujelang, the distance between Ujelang proper and Kalo is only 12 miles, whereas on Enewetak, the distance between islet #34 and Engebi (#10) is about 16 miles, a closer approximation. Also, Engebi is much bigger than Kalo; it has an area of 0.343 square mile as compared to only 0.026 sq. mile, according to Bryan's Guide to Place Names.

Point 6.—What is said about the existing winds and currents cannot be used to differentiate between the two atolls, even if we knew the prevailing conditions. Another item which must also remain neutral is the intervening islet that was between the first and last place of anchorage of the ship; it can apply equally well to both atolls.

Point 7.—As for the pass through which they left the atoll, we are not told where it was located, only that it was "a very wide and very good one". There is no such thing at Ujelang, whereas it is one of the remarkable features of Enewetak.