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The Pacific Islands Magazine[™]

Voyage Through Micronesia: Mau Piailug Comes Home

By Bud Bendix

This was a historic voyage, the 2,800-mile journey of *Makali'i*. It marked the first such trip by a traditional Pacific Islands voyaging canoe through Micronesia, in modern times at least.

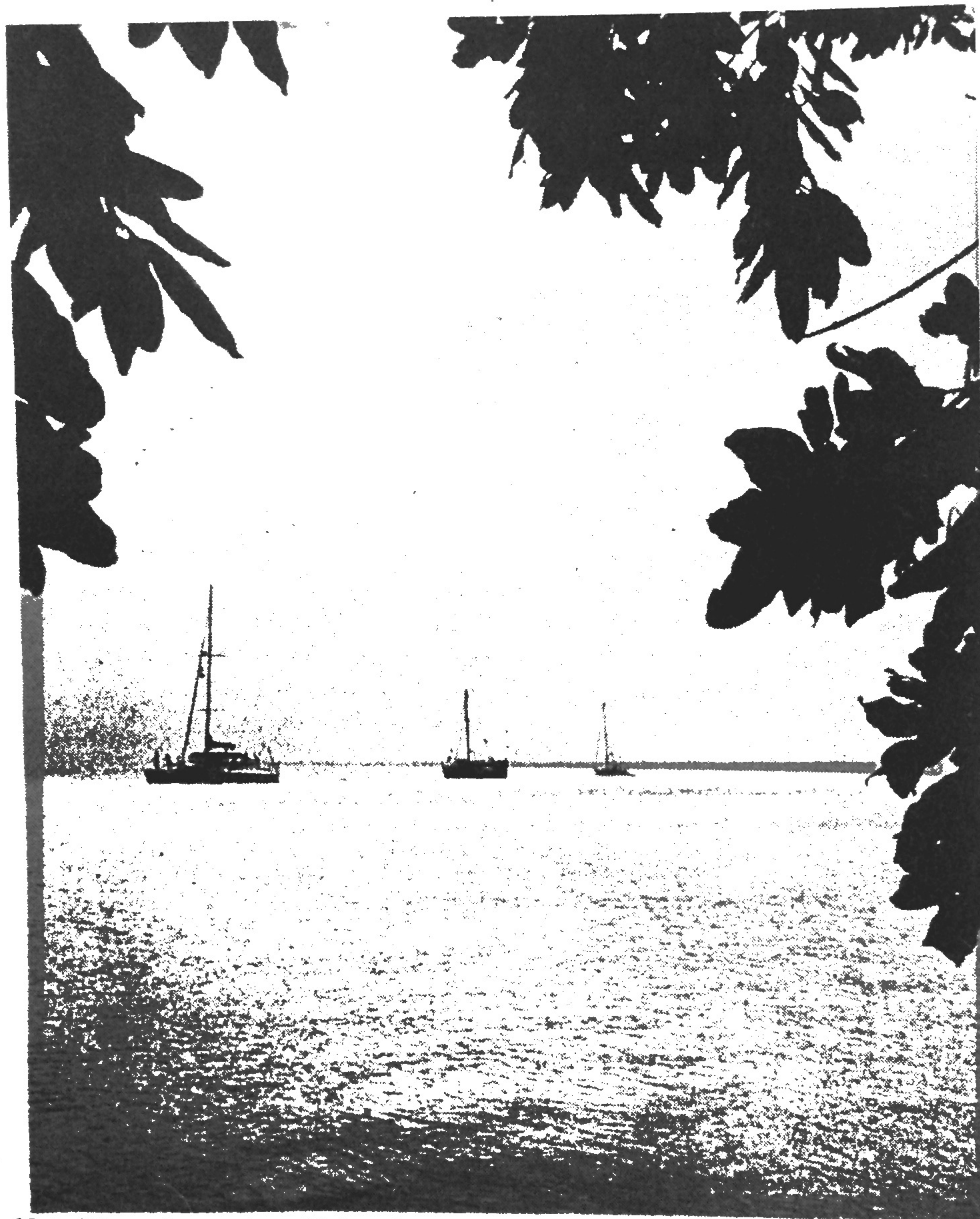
Makali'i, which already had made voyages to Tahiti and the Marquesas in the South Pacific, had one primary purpose: To take master navigator Mau Piailug home to the atoll of Satawal in the state of Yap, Federated States of Micronesia.

Mau, 66, was being shown appreciation from canoe sailors in Hawaii for teaching them the art of navigating the ocean

without instruments, but only by the stars and sea swells. He had helped guide another canoe, *Hokule'a*, on its maiden voyage to Tahiti in 1976.

His ways of navigation are thought to be derived from the methods used by ancient Polynesians, like the ones who found their way to Hawaii from the Marquesas more than 1,000 years ago. His efforts are credited with the renewed interest in voyaging among Pacific Islanders.

Capt. Clay Bertlemann, organizer of the voyage, and Capt. Chadd Paishon of *Malali'i*, said Mau was promised the trip home some years ago to honor him for his service.



Makali'i, center, enters Majuro's lagoon, with the escort boat, *Zip-pur*, leading the way. The skies were cloudy, but the greeting was sunny for the sailors.

"Mau came to teach us and now his students are taking him home," he told *Pacific Magazine* on landing at Majuro.

Thus, the 54-foot double-hull canoe, set sail on February 10 from Hualalai Resort on the Kona coast of the Big Island of Hawaii, after an 18-mile jaunt from Kawaihae where it had been prepared for its epic journey.

On board was a crew of 17, ranging in age from 19 to 67. It was estimated the entire trip would take seven weeks, with stops at Majuro, Marshall Islands; Kosrae, Pohnpei and Chuuk in the FSM, and then into the Yap Islands and the small atolls of Pulap, Puluwat and Pikelot, where Mau has relatives and friends, before reaching Satawal, where an especially ceremonious greeting awaited. They arrived there on April 10, exactly two months after leaving Hawaii.

Following are reports from correspondents on Majuro, Kosrae and Pohnpei on the arrival of the canoe at their respective islands.

* * * * *

Majuro, Marshall Islands— by Giff Johnson

It was the glow in the Microneisan navigator's eyes that reassured the Hawaiian crew. Storms were buffeting the voyaging canoe, blotting out the horizon and covering the stars with layers of clouds and rain.

Ten days west of Hawaii, bad weather was making navigation by the stars difficult, forcing the crew to steer by the much subtler hints offered by waves and wind.

But, Mau Piailug, famed navigator from tiny Satawal Atoll, who is credited with the rebirth of celestial navigation and ocean voyaging in Hawaii, wasn't losing any sleep aboard *Makali'i* as it got closer to the Marshall Islands.

"It's a funny thing," said Capt. Chadd Paishon. "Mau was used to the constant rain squalls. For us, it was a dramatic difference from Hawaii. Everytime a squall blew in, it was like, whoa, more weather coming."

"But Mau; the closer we got to the Marshalls, we could see his reaction. His eyes started to glitter with happiness."

Despite having never made this voyage, Mau and *Makali'i* navigator Shorty Bertlemann steered the canoe to Majuro as if they had compass, sextant and CPS (global positioning system) on board. (The canoe was accompanied by an escort vessel, and only carried a radio to

Mary Lou Foley



Gift Johnson

Dancers, women on the left, and male crew members above, entertained at dockside upon *Makali'i's* arrival in Majuro. The sailors performed Hawaiian sailing chants at each of their stops, much to the delight of their greeters, who often responded in kind with dances and songs of their own. Much good will and cultural sharing came from the canoe's voyage through Micronesia.

communicate its position with voyage organizers.)

Because they thought it might be difficult to locate Majuro's low lying coral islands, they used a 180-mile north-south target with the islands of Aur and Kili as the outside boundaries for getting to the atoll.

But, they needn't have worried. The two navigators, following in the wake of their forefathers who had no modern navigation aids, piloted *Makali'i* straight into Majuro in 21 days. And, with Mar-

shall Islander Alson Kelen aboard, identifying Majuro proved an easy task. This was the longest leg by far of the trip—2,300 miles of open ocean.

The voyage was historic, connecting Hawaiians with Marshallese and Micronesians through canoe culture that is at the very heart of all Pacific Island heritage. It was a milestone, too, because, although such voyages are the staple of oral traditions, there is no history of Polynesians sailing into Micronesia or vice versa.

The trip earned additional respect for Mau. While the Hawaiian crew was challenged by the changing weather, to Mau it was just Micronesian waters, Paishon said.

"From this, we began to really understand how great is Mau's knowledge," he said. "He is constantly observing any weather changes and always paying attention. If it's like this every day, I can really appreciate the things he deals with when he sails in Micronesia."

Shorty Bertlemann observed that when a student is in training under a master navigator, the master lets the student do the navigating without interference, stepping in only if the student is in trouble.

"But, on this voyage, Mau was very involved, so we could learn," he said.

Marshall Islanders were delighted with the arrival of *Makali'i*. Hiroshi Yamamura, internal affairs minister, told the legend of how Marshall Islanders came to learn navigation from two Yapese who appeared one day on the shores of southern Namdrik Atoll.

Normally, strangers were immediately killed in the Marshalls, but, according to the legend, a Marshallese woman took the two Yapese into her home and, in response to her kindness, taught her the skills of navigation, which have been passed down for generations.

In Micronesia—and the Marshalls—traditions of canoe building and sailing had not been lost, as they were in Hawaii.

(Continued on page 46)



Gift Johnson

Mau Plailug is presented with a stick chart that Marshallese sailors used traditionally for navigation.

Voyage—

(Continued from page 45)

But, the age-old art was losing ground to videos, nightclubs and motor boats, until a recent resurgence.

The *Waan Aelon Kein* (canoes of these islands) canoe-building program was launched in 1989, which helped rebuild enthusiasm locally. The Outrigger Hotel has sponsored the Marshall Islands Cup canoe race since 1997 in another move to build interest.

Without this activity, "our traditional sailing knowledge would have been lost and our stick charts, once the envy of navigational teaching instruments, would today be nothing more than just woven sticks of a forgotten past," Yamaura said in welcoming the *Makali'i* crew.

One outdated custom was thrown overboard on the Hawaii-Majuro leg. Four of

the crew members were women. In fact, for the Majuro-Kosrae leg, seven women were in the crew.

The voyagers arrive in Pohnpei.

Mau, noting that in his islands only men sail canoes, said the women sailors distinguished themselves by often jumping to take on arduous tasks he assigned more quickly than did the men.

Bertlemann added one important thought before *Makali'i* sailed on:

"We try to instill pride in our traditions. The more we understand, the more we realize how much we don't know and how talented our ancestors were."

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Kosrae, FSM—

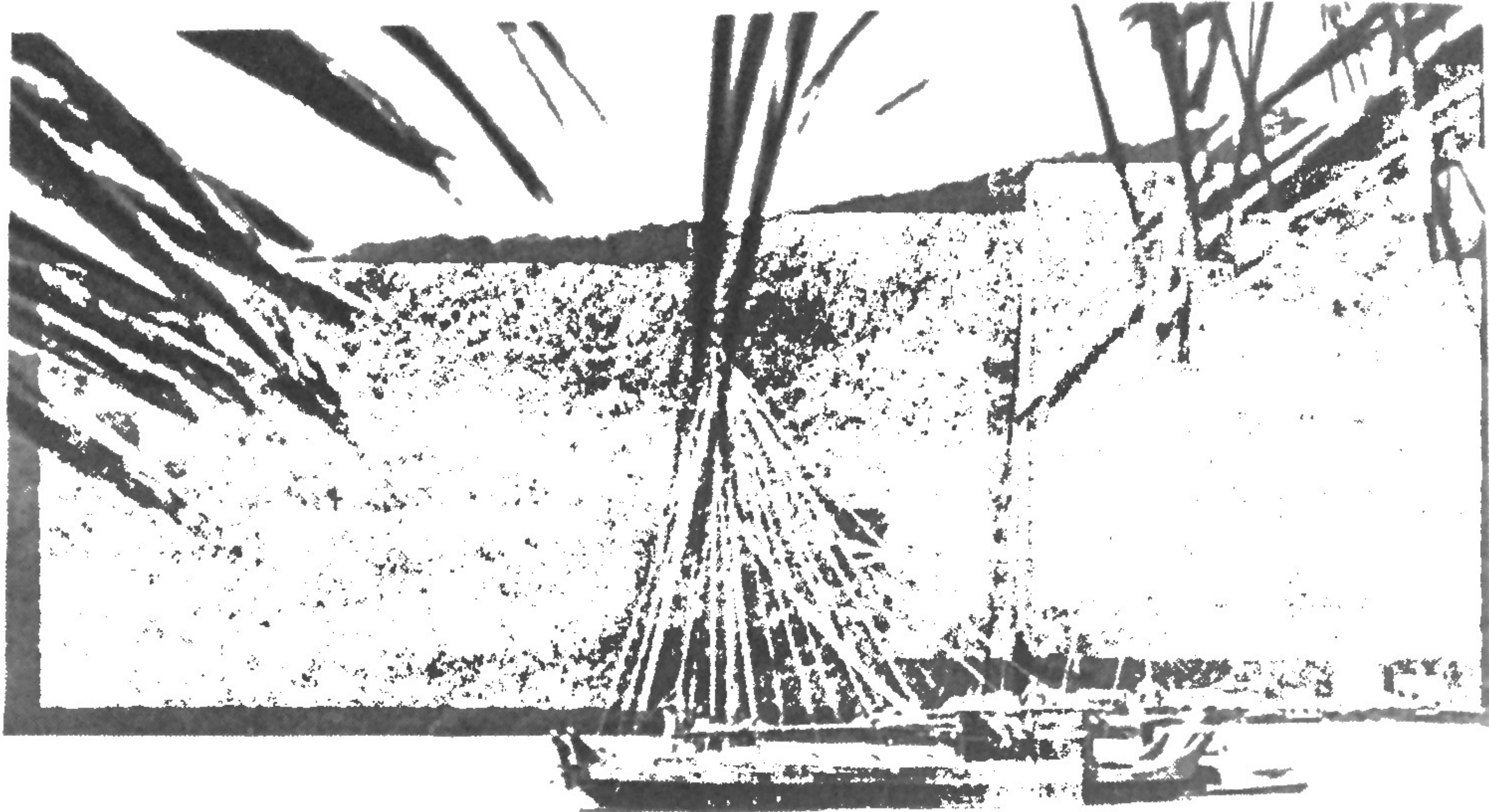
By Kathy Reddy

Late Friday morning, March 12, the Hawaiian canoe *Makali'i* docked in Lelu, Kosrae, accompanied by its escort catamaran, *Zip-pur*. On board the canoe was the man we all came to see, Mau Piailug, the master navigator and teacher. It was first top in the FSM for the vessel.

There was an official welcoming program at the dock, arranged by Lelu Mayor Joab Sigrah. A speech of welcome was made by Kosrae Gov. Rensley Sigrah. The Lelu choir sang and an invocation given by Rev. Takeo Likiaksa.

Two tables full of local fruit were donated by the Kosrae Farmers Cooperative. In turn, the crew members entertained the welcomers with a Hawaiian sailing chant. This was followed by lunch at the Kosrae Nautilus Resort.

Highlight of the day was a private feast for the visitors and several local dignitaries at Kosrae Village Resort restaurant arranged by Singkitchy George, director of the Kosrae Department of Commerce and Industry. It consisted of



Gene Ashby



Mary Lou Foley

Flying the Hawaii state flag, *Makali'i* prepares to dock at Majuro, while a few of the crew take a refreshing dip.

many local foods from land and sea. There was a demonstration of *fwa fwa* (something like poi) pounding.

The evening's entertainment consisted of local stick dances by some of Lelu's boys. Girls contributed Kosraean chants and dances. The canoe crew presented the governor with a framed picture of *Makali'i*, signed by Mau and the crew.

Mau invited one Kosraean to travel with them to Pohnpei and Henson Sigrah was chosen. Kosrae Village Resort, Sandy Beach Hotel, Tree Lodge Hotel and Kosrae Nautilus Resort provided lodgings for the visitors.

Speaking to the gathering, Mau said, "I'm sorry for what we have lost," referring to the skills of past generations. However, in his native language, he expressed hope for the future with the people who have learned the art of traditional navigation from him and who are now teaching others. He urged us to remain true to our heritage.

* * * * *

Pohnpei, FSM—

by Gene Ashby

It wasn't so long ago that sailing etiquette (and safety) required that any strange canoe arrived at a new island had to wait offshore until permission was



Mau addresses welcomers on Pohnpei. (Gene Ashby)

given for the crew to land.

When the twin-hulled *Makali'i* canoe visited Pohnpei from Hawaii on March 16, however, hundreds of Pohnpeians awaited the arrival, armed only with good will and admiration.

The crew was composed of Hawaiian mariners, navigation students and traditional navigators, and overseen by the master of all navigators, Mau Pailug of Satawal Atoll.

While on Pohnpei, the crew visited the ruins of Nan Madol and offered a presentation of their experiences at the College of Micronesia-FSM. The canoe departed on March 22 for the Western Carolines and Satawal, then onward to Guam and Saipan before returning to Hawaii—a sea vagabond's dream. ■

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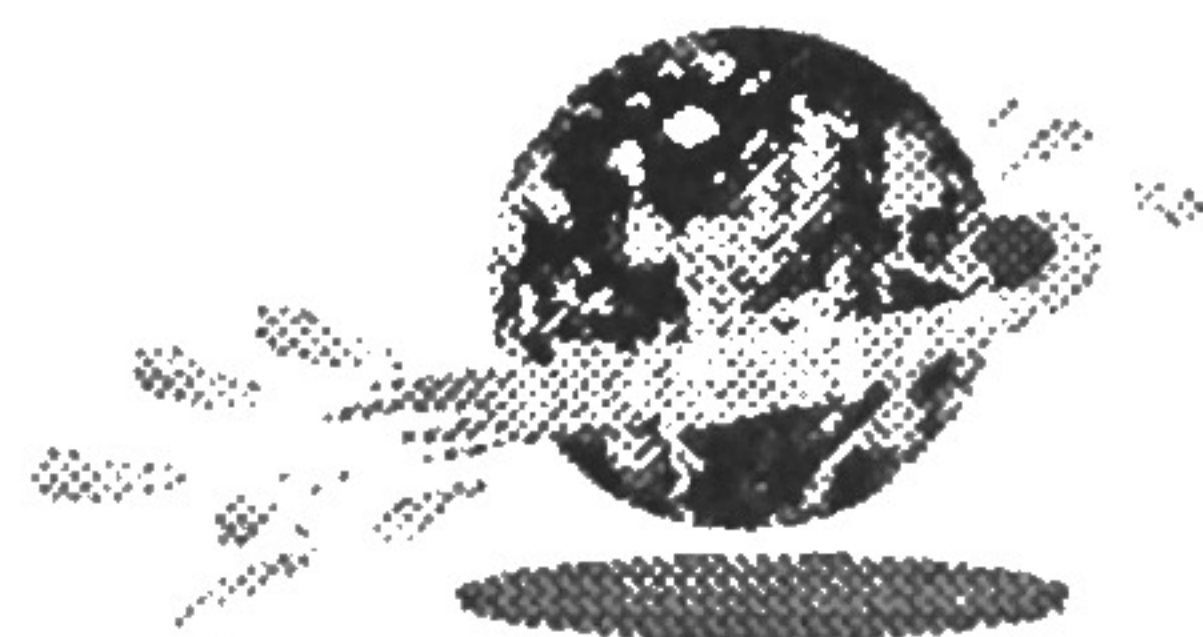
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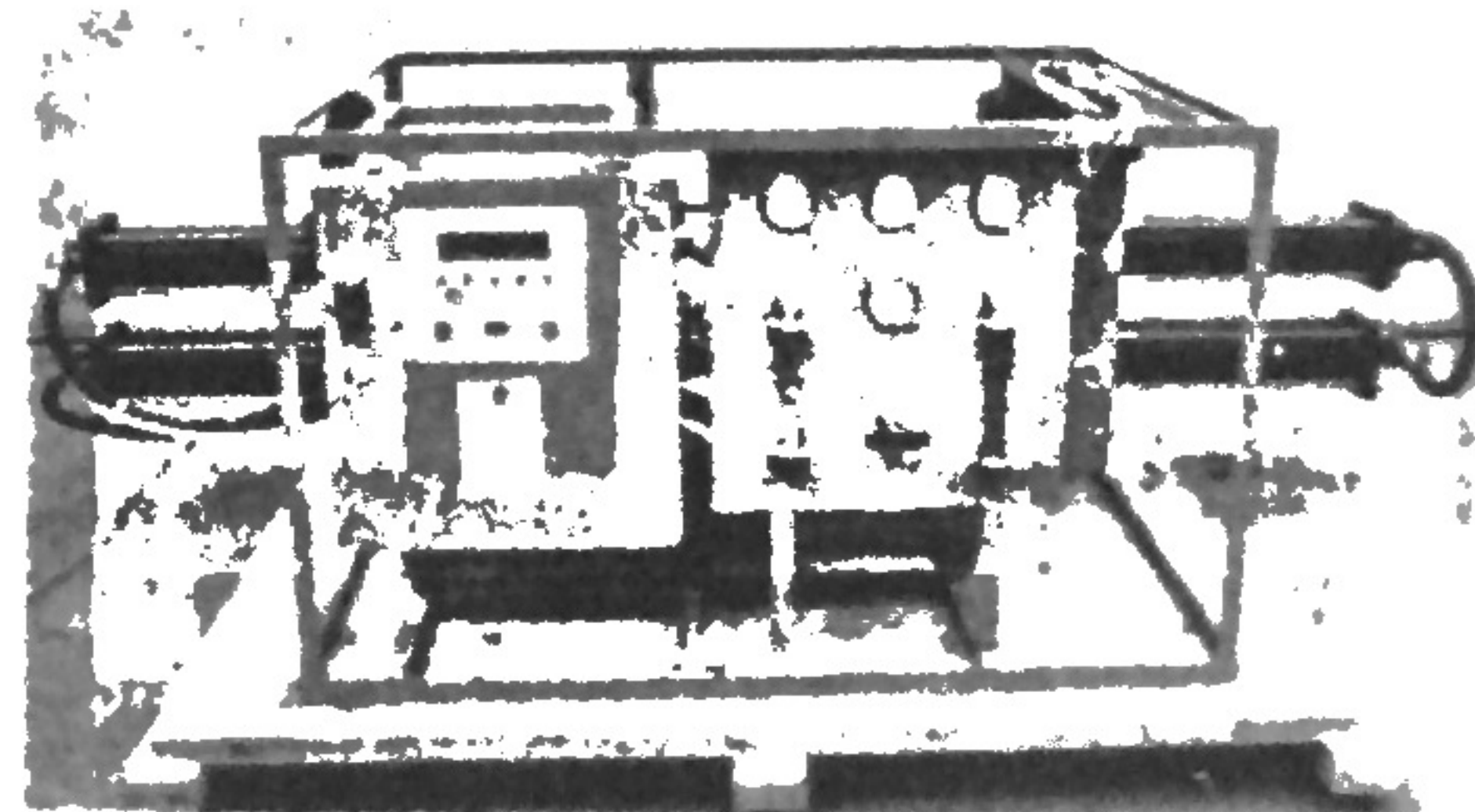


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