

# WITHIN THE MARIANAS:

## A Personal Account

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### Prelude

I had the privilege of participating in the early preparations for the visit of the escort vessel, "Chitose Maru" and the "Tipiew" to the island of Guam. The Micronesian Area Research Center (MARC) of the University of Guam through its Acting Director, Dr. Hiro Kurashina, the Pacific Society through its Executive Director, Mr. Hiroshi Nakajima and the Asian-Pacific Exposition Fukuoka '89 through the Voyage Director, Mr. Shinsuke Miyazaki coordinated with the Offices of the Governor of Guam, Immigration, Customs, the Port Authority, the Consul General of Japan, the Liaison Office of the Federated States of Micronesia, the Coast Guard, and the MAPSHIP Company, which acted as agent in all the activities regarding the Commercial Port of Guam.

Television crews from Fukuoka filmed these official visits and conducted interviews at MARC with the Acting Director, and two anthropology students, Laura Prishmont and Sabino Sauchomal, who went along on the escort vessel.

Long in advance arrangements were made for visas, clearance of the vessel, housing, and the procurement of fresh coconuts. Since the vessel and the canoe could not be cleared directly from Colonia in Yap State provision was made for the chief of Satawal Island to sign the document. All was in readiness for the voyage.

The "Tipiew" sailed from Satawal to Guam

reaching the island in four days. They slipped quietly into port after seeing the lights of Guam the evening before where they would spend some time with relatives and friends from the Satawal community.

One item of importance to Captain and Navigator, Repanglug, was the hand held radio. It did not function well on the journey north and he requested a replacement. Mr. Miyazaki and Mr. Nakajima made this a priority and procured one from the Marianas Electronics Company in Guam.

The UNEED Co. sponsored a banquet at the TOP O' THE MAR for the captain and crew of the Tipiew on Sunday evening April 10. A number of distinguished visitors from Japan joined several island dignitaries and guests in honoring these Men of Satawal.

The stage was set for the second phase of journey from Guam to Saipan. Departure was set for 10 AM, Monday, April 11, from the Commercial Port. Sr. Mary Benedict, R.S.M. made sure I had a proper lifejacket and some food. Fr. Donan Hickey, O.F.M., Cap. kindly drove me to the dockside where I unloaded my gear in preparation for storing it on the canoe. Dr. Hiro Kurashina handed me a waterproof notebook and wished me luck. Pictures were taken from all sides and we cut away from the escort vessel using paddles to move off to a safe distance.

## Routine Rules the Way

We moved easily to the center of the harbor with the escort vessel trailing at a distance. A trimaran came nearby and tossed some cans of liquid refreshment in our direction. Each was caught and stowed. Smiles and waves were exchanged as the trimaran moved off to continue its holiday.

I sat on the bench near the outrigger as we moved through the calm waters of the harbor. The captain gave orders and the crew responded.

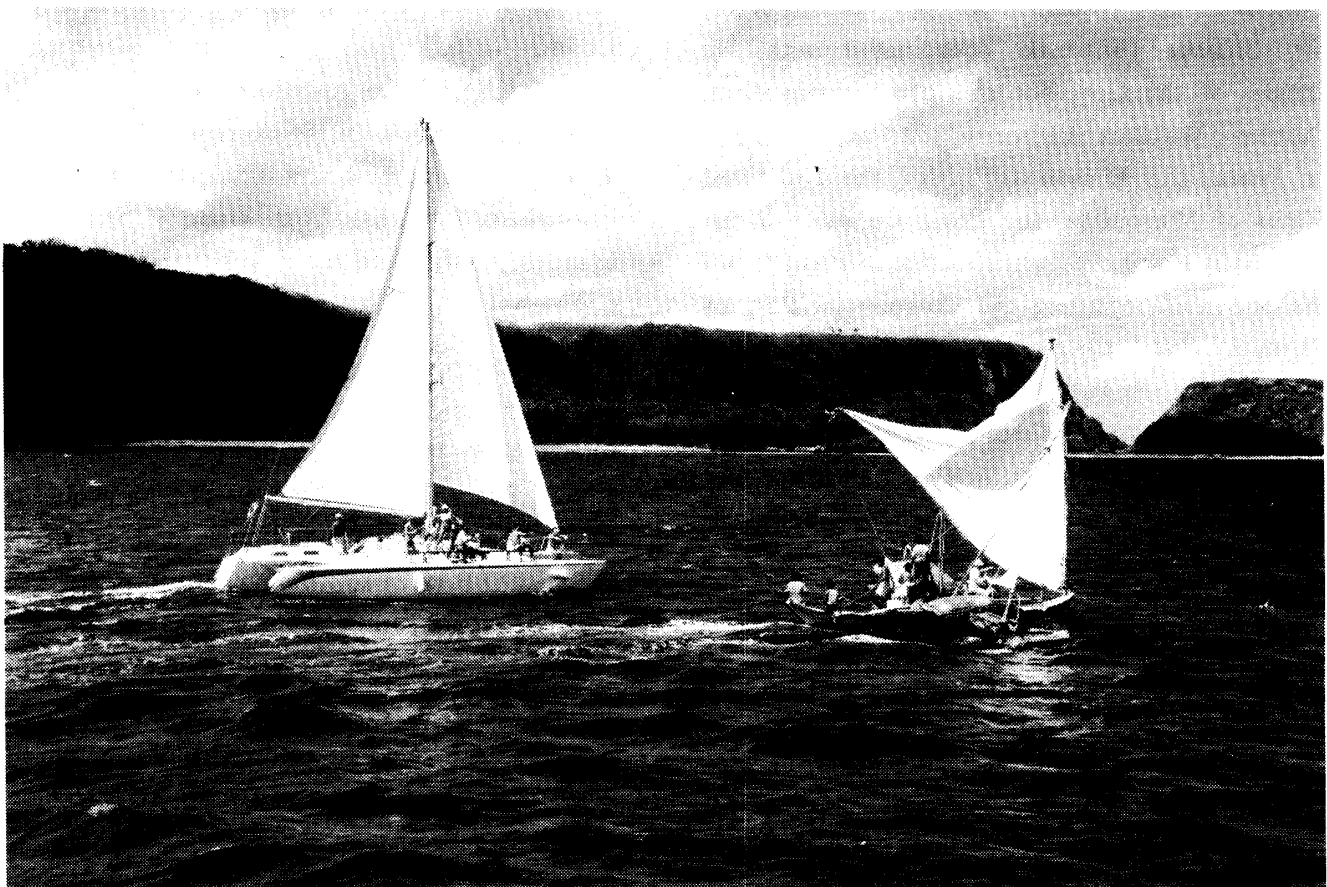
I began to muse in times past how often had the swift canoes with the lateen sails of the Marianas slipped out of Apra to journey north or fish in the deep. Thoughts raced through my mind of the number of whaleships which had in their turn entered into and departed from this harbor. How many sails were raised and lowered, how many Captains and their crews returned over and over to these waters to rest and rest between seasons on the Line and in the Sea of Japan. I also remembered an earlier time when I left the harbor

under sail to bury the cremains of a man who had loved the island and its people.

Once we cleared the harbor I had expected that we might continue along the coast of the island till we reached Merizo and then proceed north. This would have placed us into the same path usually taken from Satawal to Saipan. The decision was made to head out to sea and begin a tacking routine that would have us proceed north up the side of the island (so to speak) from Apra toward Ritidian Point.

No sooner had we begun heading to sea when it was time to eat. A large fish had been prepared on shore and delivered to the canoe before our departure. No one seemed to know the name of it but we did enjoy all the eating. A little rice added another staple to the diet.

We tacked the whole day moving up the island toward Ipao beach and beyond. There was an eagerness within me to be on with the journey and a steadfastness to see it through. As darkness set in we were heading out to sea on a tack. For supper



A trimaran came nearby and tossed some cans of liquid refreshment in Tipiew's direction.

we finished the rice and the fish we started earlier in the day.

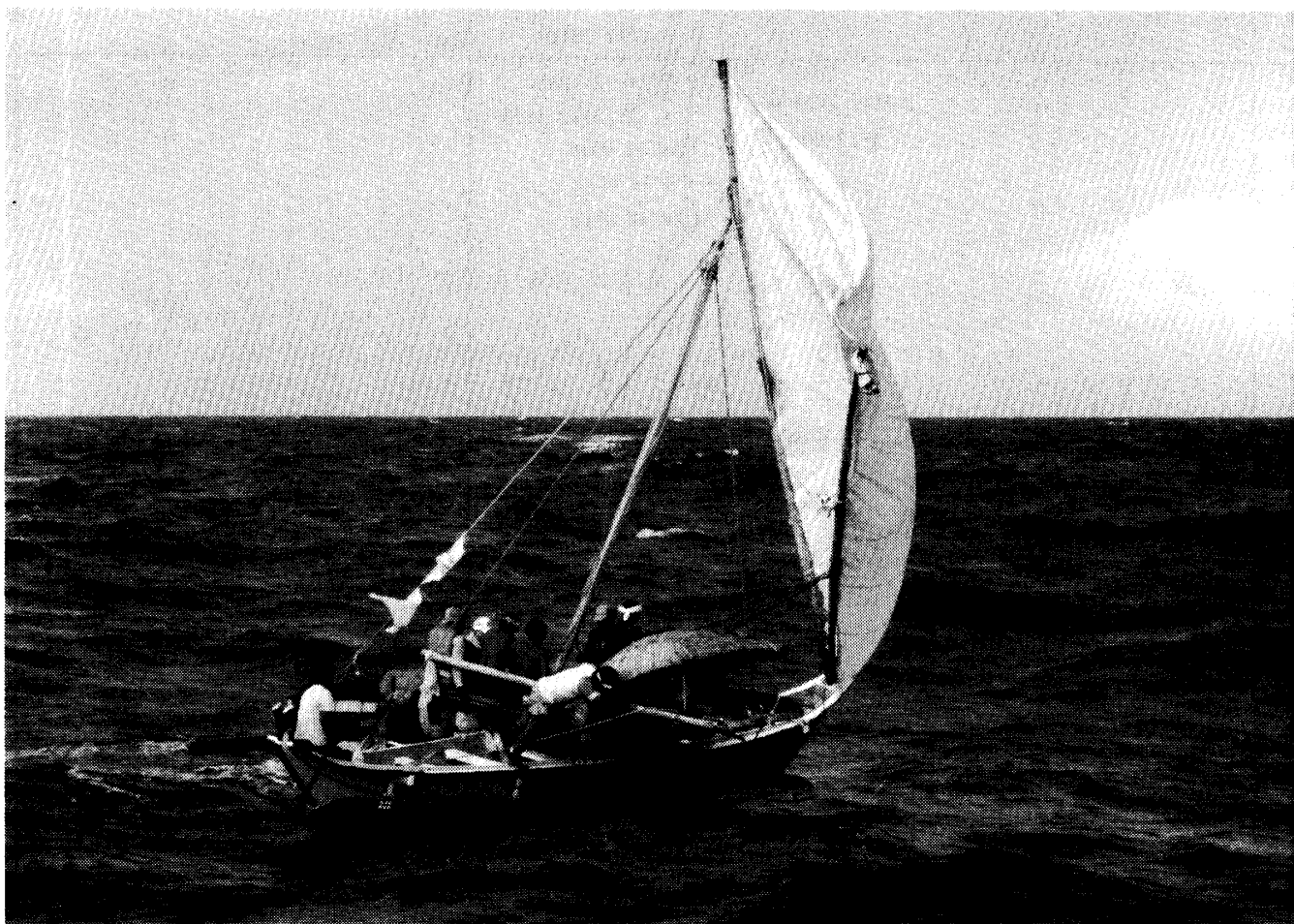
The hour grew late by my watch and I was told where to bunk down for the night. It would be on the outrigger with a plastic covering in the case of rain. I had watched the lights flashing near the outrigger of the canoe at dusk. They seemed to appear with the darkening sky and recede with the light of the early morning. The repetition in this routine continued to attract and fascinate me.

The members of the crew would work for about two hours and then begin to sleep either sitting with their arms slumped over the rail of the bench or in the body of the canoe head propped to one side with legs dangling. The commands came through the night to change the direction of the sail and begin the tack toward the shore depending upon conditions. I remember waking early in the morning of Tuesday, April 12, to see the lights of Guam still. We were at the Naval Facility near Ritidian Point but still not quite into the roads between Rota and Guam.

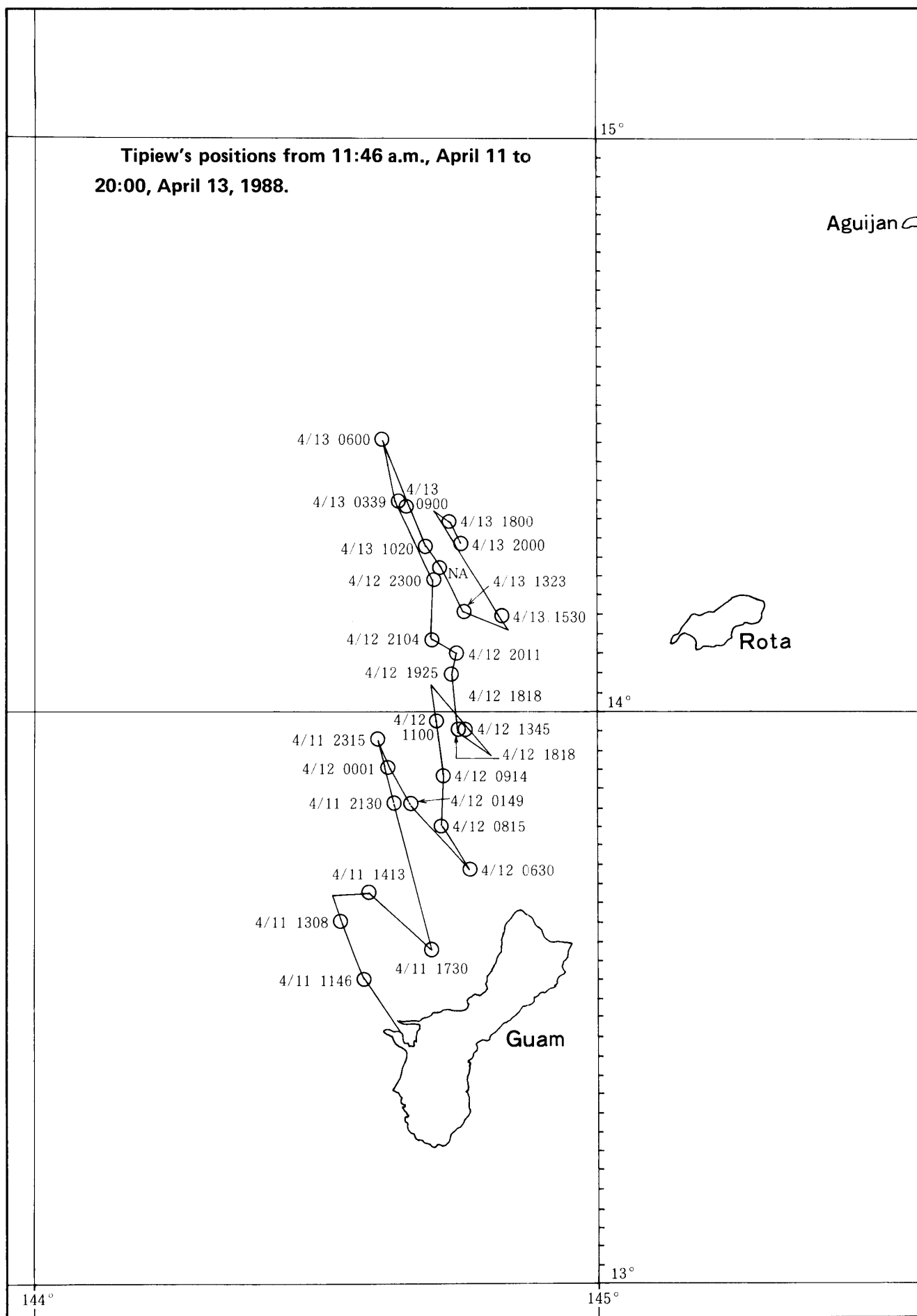
The collective wisdom I had recieved indicated that the expected time for the journey might be 36 to 48 hours depending on the winds. The winds continued to be unfavorable and we were forced to tack but this time the island of Guam was no longer in position to shield us and we received the full thrust of the currents flowing between Rota and Guam.

The captain of the canoe made regular radio contact with the escort vessel which remained at a discreet distance. It would approach at times to look us over both in daylight and at night and then drop back off the pace to a safe distance. We passed the second day looking for Rota and hoping to pass it by on the way to Saipan. At the end of a tack the sail was changed with the entire crew working to move it from one position to the other under the direction of the captain.

I asked a question "*ifei Luta*" or where is Rota (*Luta* being the traditional name in Chamorro and Satawalese for Rota). The men has answered this question for the captain both in daylight and when



Around 10:00 a.m. in the 2nd day, April 12, 1988.



the stars were out at night. In daylight they pointed in one direction and with experienced eyes could trace an outline of the land. I saw only with eyes of faith trusting in the routine that had honed this skill and hoping to see it someday with clarity. At night the stars were in place and the one to Rota was clearly marked. Storm clouds might obscure it but it was always there when they passed.

By late evening we were hungry and it was time for resupply. A line was thrown to us and a sealed container sent from the escort vessel to the canoe. It held some warm rice and meat and some sets of raingear for the crew. The weather was getting stormy and all the men were wearing was the traditional "thu" or loincloth. We enjoyed the meal and the men felt protected from the elements.

Each time it rained the sail was lowered to avoid damage from the force of the winds. This was an invariable routine. Sometimes a member of the crew would use the paddle to keep the course heading as the sail was raised and caught the wind. Late on the night of April 12 the decision was made to set a course for *Luta* in order to give the crew some rest from the constant tacking.

I asked early the next morning, April 13, did the crew know anyone there. The answer came that on the journey from Satawal they did indeed stop for a rest and a Yapese man always welcomed them there. He died a little while ago and so they now had no one.

The tacking routine continued throughout the day with the hopes of reaching land. All the men were needed to change the sail and on occasion the captain would lend a hand while giving directions. At times I held the lines to the mast while sitting on the outrigger but still out of the way of the activity of bringing the sail past the mast and into its new position. This was an invariable routine.

The whole day, the 13th, was full of hope and into the early evening. *Luta* was on our minds. The Storms came and went at sea.

I recall rather often during the night that as the

outrigger plunged into the waters a cold shiver went through the body. It caused an involuntary shaking for a few moments. Then as warmer waters were passed through the shaking subsided. Later I asked an experienced canoe traveller about this and he agreed that he had felt the same thing. The tired condition of the men, the short chance of reaching *Luta*, the long chance of reaching Saipan, and the stormy weather and currents forced a new decision on all.

The canoe changed course for Guam very early on the morning of April 14th and began a long 12 hour journey into Apra Harbor. As the sun rose and we were within sight of Ritidian Point at the northern end of the island and we slowly passed along the familiar sights we had seen on the outward journey. Close to noon we entered the harbor and were taken to the dockside. After some delay the usual landing formalities were completed. Once again the kind Fr. Donan picked me up and returned me to Agana Heights.

Within a few days a decision was made to proceed directly from Guam to Japan. I was disappointed that there would be no further attempts to reach Saipan on this journey but grateful for the privilege of sailing with so distinguished a captain and his young crew.

I had begun to learn something of the routine of the canoe crew at sea and their continuous response to the changing conditions of wind and wave. These men of Satawal are the last ones in the world to call this portion of the Pacific "*mare nostrum*" or our sea.

