

ON THE GO

Yap Between Flights

with Carl Heine

MOGETHINI!

Yap has much to recommend itself to the tourist. It is true that her people may lack the sophistication of the Saipanese, or the drive of the Paluans, and the islands may lack the scenic beauty of Ponape (described as the "Hollywood version of a south sea island"), or the intimate charm of Palau's Rock Islands. Yet the traveler is often reluctant to leave this small island of which he so quickly becomes a part. The pace, the placidity and serenity help one repair the ragged edges of one's soul and create a pace more in harmony with one's own nature.

The Yapese, the most traditional of all Micronesians, are absolutely secure in the knowledge of their own superiority and rival the Americans on the point. From this Olympian vantage, they view the foreigner with friendly, amused detachment and the certain knowledge that the camera, the jaunty step, and the funny clothes belong to a race of people who can most delicately be called quixotic.

The attitudes of the Yapese, who think they own the place, and the Americans, who don't give a damn who owns it, make for friendly relations and mutual respect. The tourist will find

the: Yapese and foreign workers alike eager to point out places of interest, describe their favorite beaches, perhaps (after 4:30 PM) invite him to O'Keefe's Oasis for a smart drink.

O'Keefe's is a membership club, but the tourist is not likely to be aware of this circumstance unless he gains the ill-will of the barkeeps, Anna and Margie, heroines worthy of W. Somerset Maugham, who dispense strong drink and justice with a cavalier disregard for the superficialities of all manmade and natural laws, and are majestic even in what lower mortals might describe as "errors." However, if the drinker will be good, refrain from cussing, and wear a shirt after 6:00 PM, he may drink to the depths of his pocketbook and the needs of his psyche. At eleven o'clock weeknights, one o'clock or thereabouts weekends, the bar closes, and reality (and, often, rain) is the tourist's hard lot.

If the O'Keefe's Oasis is found to be too Americanized, the traveler may find the Seamen's Club more to the style of local people and therefore more interesting. Here one will see a great

number of transplanted Paluans and other Yapese congregate for a smarter drink called "Yap Singapore." The Seamen's Club is only several yards from O'Keefe's, across the bridge over the narrow canal separating Colonia from Rul.

Fortunately, Joe Tamag's hotel, the Rai View, is but a few steps from O'Keefe's. The hotel is sparkling clean, and the food is unpretentious and good. Fancy local meals consisting of fish, pig, turtle, taro and tapioca, all presented in fresh green palm frond baskets, are served by special request in the hotel dining room. Room reservations should be made well in advance, inasmuch as the hotel is frequently booked to capacity with tired bureaucrats from Saipan who know the best spots and love an occasional visit to this most serene island in the Trust Territory. Room rates range from \$4 to \$10 per night, depending on accommodations. The hotel is being enlarged and shops and a bar are to be added.

All of Colonia is easily accessible from the hotel. The hospital is within hobbling distance (if you arrived ill), the

the watchful eye of Mike Littler, the principal, and perhaps the best PR man in the Trust Territory. His graduates receive congratulations from President Nixon, and the major speaker at commencement this year (as last) was Rear Adm. Paul Pugh, Commander of the Naval Forces, Marianas. Graduation is the social event of the entire season.

The Ulithians are big, beautiful, energetic people. During the school year, the tourist will find the students in school all day, at supervised study tables most evenings, and, finally, being chased off to bed by the excellent U.S. and Micronesian faculty who want fresh, alert students in the morning.

The tourist will note that the island is clean, and the school buildings and houses are in good repair, mostly the result of student labor under the direction of the Public Works Department and members of the SeaBee teams.

To the east, each island from Falalop to Satawal is so varied and so unique that an entire article could be devoted to each -- from Ngulu where not a stone is out of place and every fallen leaf is immediately picked up and buried, to the fantastic beaches of Ifalik and Lamotrek.

The tourist will note that the airport at Yap is always crowded with non-travellers who might otherwise be downtown watching haircuts; and he will leave with the satisfied feeling that his quick perception and sensitivity have yielded him much in this district which has many small things to recommend themselves to the tourist.

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district administration building even closer. And there is a department store of sorts where one can buy a variety of local products--grass skirts, carvings, shell jewelry. Foreign products are available, too, often much cheaper than on Guam. The chances of buying stone money are slim. First, one would have to find a piece, and then legislative permission is required to remove it from Yap.

From the hotel one can see the Protestant Mission, easily the most beautiful complex of buildings on an island dotted with fantastically un-stylish buildings. Not traditional, but still not doing violence to the aesthetics of the surroundings, the church rests familiarly on the hillside on the lower slope of which is the manse. Across the road is the Protestant Youth Center where one can buy ice cream cones, sandwiches, and passion fruit punch at prices too low to mention. The minister has built the substantial beginnings of a marina, and the entire complex is as scrupulously clean as German compulsion and the protestant ethic demand.

Up the hill from the hotel is the Yap Museum, presided over by Raphael Uag, an interesting, intelligent man with a wealth of stories he can relate in excellent English or Japanese. But even if he did not have the qualifications just noted, he would still have to be in charge of the museum because he is the most colorful person on the island. Old, as wise men should be, and with a wispy white beard, he commands the immediate respect of the visitor. Tall, gaunt, wirey, he welcomes visitors graciously to the traditional Yapese building which houses Yapese artifacts.

A number of car rental operators flourish on the island. Often, it is impossible for the tourist to rent a car, the demand being so great. However, should he be able to secure one, a

seventeen mile drive over the best roads (save, perhaps, Saipan's) in the Trust Territory is available -- from the adequate beach at Giliman where one can walk to the reef at low tide and swim comfortably at high tide, to the villages on Map (pronounced "mop") where, more often than not, one can watch traditional dances.

The Yapese are extremely proud of their beautiful island, a mountainous, true continental island, and finding a guide is not difficult. Among the virtues in the vegetation the guide will ask you to observe is the betel nut tree. Yap grows the finest betel nut in the Trust Territory, and one seldom sees a person leave Yap to visit friends in Palau or Guam without a basket of betel nuts, some pepper leaf, and some lime. The guide will ask the adventuresome tourist to try the betel nut. It is an interesting experience.

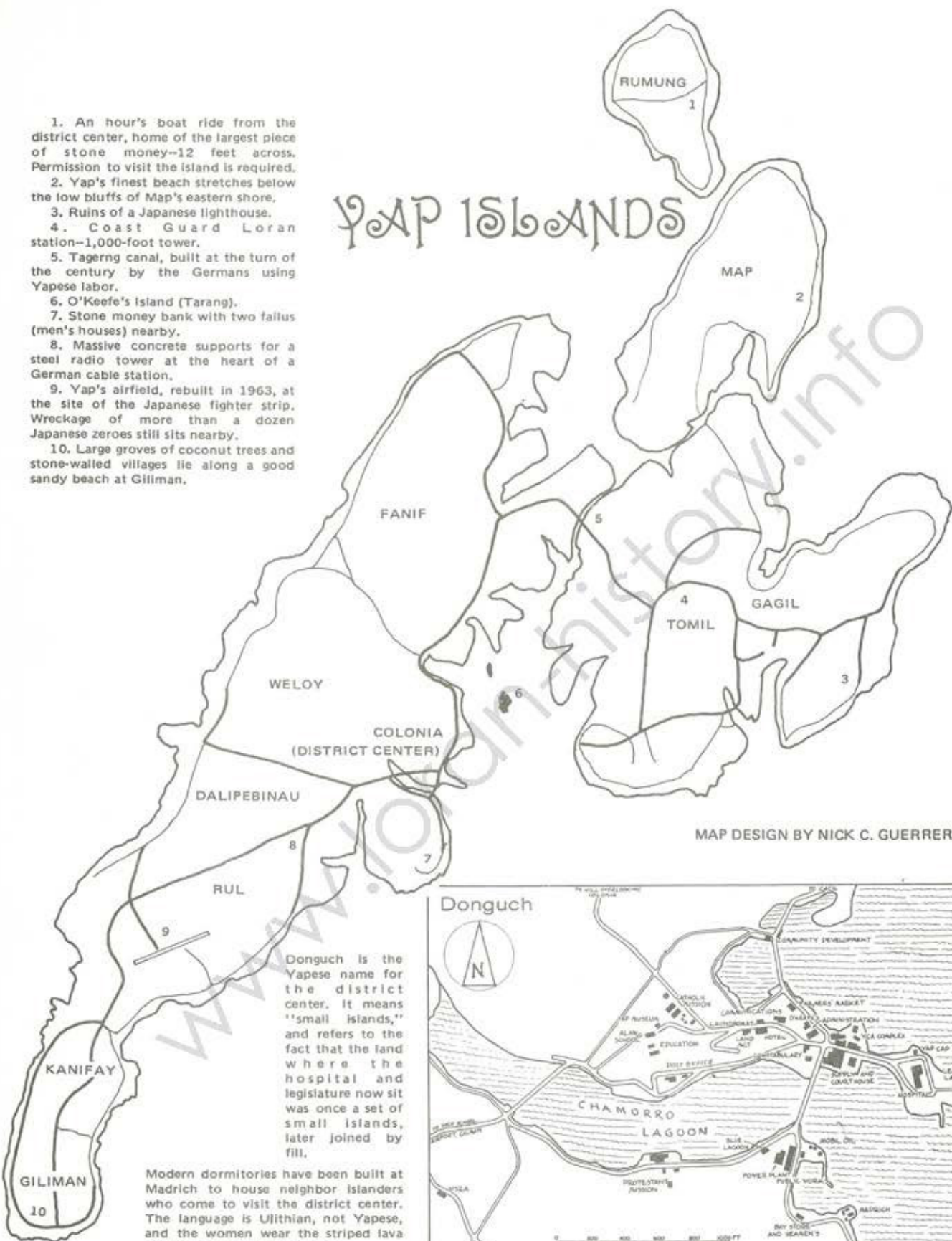
The betel nut quid is prepared by biting the rather firm nut in half and placing both halves on a piece of pepper leaf. (The pepper leaf is not hot; chewed alone, it makes the mouth feel clean.) Over the nut and leaf dry lime is sprinkled. (The lime is prepared in the villages by people who burn coral, the residue of which is a fine lime ash.) The betel nut is rolled in the leaf and the entire quid is chewed. There are the spit-out-the-juice advocates and the swallow-the-juice advocates, but, to the best of my knowledge, they have not come to blows -- unlike Swift's Big Endians and Little Endians. Indeed, I have seen regular chewers change sides, midstream, so to speak. For the quickest, most intense effect, I recommend swallowing the juice. In a matter of minutes, your heart will palpitate, your forehead will perspire, and you will feel very light-headed. At this point, you will be seeking a gentle, grassy knoll on which to lie. Lie down. The effect passes soon, and for this not unpleasant experience, you will have a wealth of conversational fodder for your first cocktail party back in Searchlight, Nevada.

Unless your guide owns a boat, water transportation is difficult to come by. However, the dauntless explorer who wishes to see O'Keefe's Island will manage, somehow. All overgrown now, and totally in ruins, the house remains as a foundation, a water catchment, and a stairwell which leads interestingly up to nothing. However, from the top of the stairway, one has an overview of the grounds, and, should one be of a romantic, speculative turn of mind, one can reconstruct the gracious house, imported brick by brick from Hong Kong (along with the skill and labor to build it, I suspect).

It would take a lively imagination to fit the humans into these ruins. David Dean O'Keefe, ship captain, first entrepreneur of Yap, and King of all he surveyed, left Savannah, Georgia, his wife and baby daughter about the middle of the last century, under the shadow of the gallows. He was shipwrecked off the coast of Yap, and was the sole survivor of the tragedy. This Irishman, of the I-can-lick-any-man-in-the-house school, probably survived because of his great strength and excellent physical condition. He was nursed back to health by a Yapese, a medicine man from Kanifay, one of the ten municipalities of Yap. He got along well with the Yapese, and the doctor became his life-long friend. Ultimately, he found an outbound ship and sailed to Hong Kong (where he stayed long enough to find a partner, a Chinese dentist with money and a ship, an old Chinese junk in bad repair); to Nauru (where he stayed long enough to find a wife, a beautiful half English, half Nauruan girl); and to Palau (where he stayed long enough to discover that the Yapese would work with unbelievable fervor and run many, often fatal, risks to carve stone money and return it to Yap in their light boats). Up to that point, no one had succeeded in convincing the Yapese to do anything so ridiculous as gathering

YAP ISLANDS

1. An hour's boat ride from the district center, home of the largest piece of stone money—12 feet across. Permission to visit the island is required.
2. Yap's finest beach stretches below the low bluffs of Map's eastern shore.
3. Ruins of a Japanese lighthouse.
4. Coast Guard Loran station—1,000-foot tower.
5. Tagerng canal, built at the turn of the century by the Germans using Yapese labor.
6. O'Keefe's Island (Tarang).
7. Stone money bank with two fallus (men's houses) nearby.
8. Massive concrete supports for a steel radio tower at the heart of a German cable station.
9. Yap's airfield, rebuilt in 1963, at the site of the Japanese fighter strip. Wreckage of more than a dozen Japanese zeroes still sits nearby.
10. Large groves of coconut trees and stone-walled villages lie along a good sandy beach at Giliman.



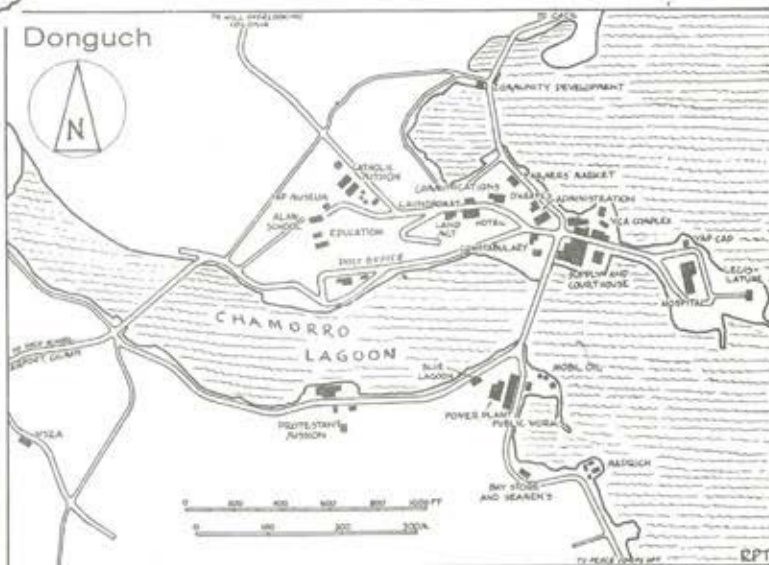
MAP DESIGN BY NICK C. GUERRERO

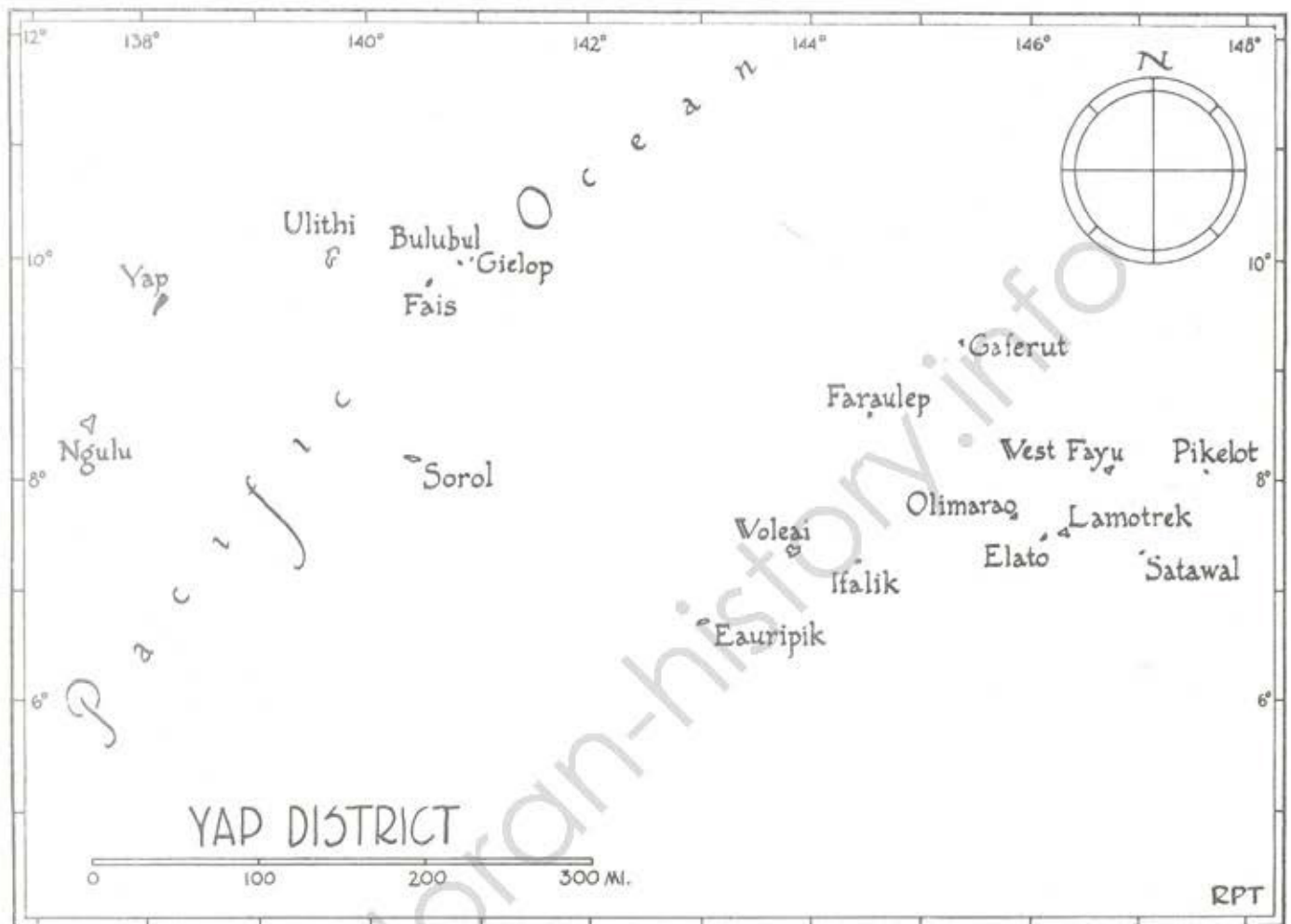
Donguch is the Yapese name for the district center. It means "small islands," and refers to the fact that the land where the hospital and legislature now sit was once a set of small islands, later joined by fill.

Modern dormitories have been built at Madrich to house neighbor islanders who come to visit the district center. The language is Ulithian, not Yapese, and the women wear the striped lava lava in place of the grass skirt.

LEGEND

- improved roads
- unimproved roads or trails





coconuts, husking them, drying the meat, and loading this end product aboard outbound ships.

Thus, O'Keefe discovered the secret that was to make him a rich man, a man with a tropical paradise, a man who stood tall in the banks in Hong Kong, a city that afforded him the best of everything during his trips there. He had the best of all possible worlds, a captain's paradise. He offered to help transport the stone money safely in his big ship if the Yapese would prepare copra and gather trepang, a sea slug which, when dried, is much favored by rich Chinese for holiday breakfasts. O'Keefe survived German competition, Spanish rule, British aid, Bully Hayes, only to be defeated by German occupation: he made the serious error of hitting the German District

Administrator when the latter suggested that O'Keefe fly the German flag instead of his own gaudy ensign. He escaped the island with his sons, and all were lost at sea in a severe typhoon.

O'Keefe was a man burdened by guilt -- he thought he had killed a man, and he suffered remorse all his life for having deserted his wife and child. He corresponded frequently with his first wife -- by check, never a letter. But he loved his second wife and family and was content in Yap, where, off and on for forty years, he represented popular authority. However, he always worked through his doctor-friend, and ultimately, through the chiefs. He learned something early on which has to be newly learned by every administration: The Yapese are extremely independent and insist upon

doing only what is important to them and only in their own way.

But I digress:

Should the tourist be lucky enough to be on Yap when a field trip is being readied for the outer islands, and should he have the hearty nature necessary for such a trip, he can arrange quite easily, again, with Joe Tamag, for passage. Twelve dollars, round trip to Ulithi, about \$126 for the long trip to Satawal and back. Field trips come in two sizes -- the short field trip to Ulithi lasts from two to five days. One may live aboard the vessel, or, much preferred, sleep on the beach on Falalop, Ulithi. The single industry of this tiny island -- 5/8 of a mile long -- is education. During the school year there are nearly 400 students from all of the outer islands, grades seven through twelve, all under