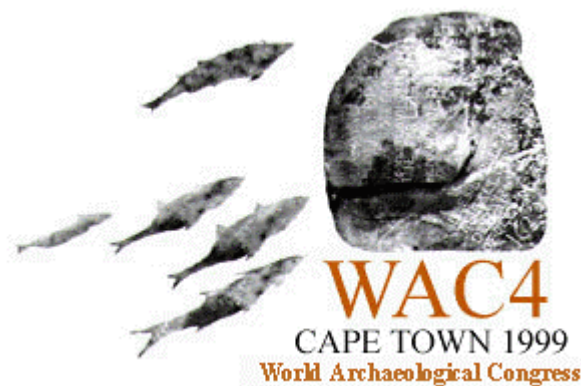


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Symposium: *MATERIEL CULTURE*: international perspectives on recent military remains

Forgotten and refound military structures in Central Pacific.

Henrick Christiansen

Background: Between 1992-1994 the Historic Preservation Office in Majuro, Republic of The Marshall Islands, surveyed four Japanese military bases as part of a Historic Preservation Program and Tourism development plan. The bases are located on remote atolls and were, until a few years ago, only reached occasionally by Copra boats. Today Air Marshall flies to the atolls on weekly basis, thus paving the way for tourists to visit the former Japanese military sites

In 1914 when Japan took over the German possessions in Micronesia, they also became a threat to the American dominance in the Pacific. Micronesia was ruled under military governance until 1922 when the League of Nations gave it to Japan as a C- Mandate, that is, they were not to fortify the area. Later this was guaranteed by the Washington Naval Limitations Treaty of 1922. In 1935 Japan withdrew from the League of Nations and sealed off her mandated areas to foreigners. This action of course triggered suspicions of Japanese military activities in the region. After the end of World War II, the debate continued whether the area was fortified or not, but no decisive proof has been found so far.

One thing can be said for certain: In 1943, when the US forces fought their way up through the Central Pacific, they found well-fortified military bases on the Marshall Islands. Only a few, however were taken by military force. The remaining bases were bypassed and left isolated in the American hinterland. After the war, these bases were abandoned and the remote atolls, on which they were located, remained relatively isolated until recently, when regular air service was established.

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The purpose of this paper is not to discuss military strategic considerations. Instead, it is the intention to present an outline of the remains of four Japanese military bases which were bypassed in the military campaign between 1942-1945. All the bases were built on small atolls in the Ralik and Radak chains which today constitute the Marshall Islands. The names of the islands are: Torwa on the Maloelap atoll, Wojja on the Wojja Atoll, Emiej on the Jalwoj Atoll and, finally, Mili on the Mili Atoll.

In order to understand the function and structure of the bases, it is necessary to take a quick look at the Marshall Islands in a World War II perspective. In this respect, the bases on the Kwajalein atoll (Roi- Namur and Kwajalein islands), Enewetak and Majuro on the Majuro atoll must also be included.

The Marshall Islands constituted the eastern-most defense perimeter in the Japanese defense chain against the USA. The northern part of the area, that is, Eiken Kio or Wake Island, had long been a US military outpost and transfer area for the civilian air traffic. The island was conquered shortly after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941. The attack on Wake started from bases on the Marshall Islands.

In 1941, the Japanese Navy headquarters in Chuuk established a subordinate command (the 6th base force) on Kwajalein, while the other bases were commissioned to the following duties:

Torwa on the Maloelap atoll: Strictly a land-based air-defense base with long-ranging land-based surveillance planes and fighters.

Emiej on the Wojja atoll: Sea plane base with long-ranging Kawanishi H8K seaplanes

Jalwot on the Jalwot atoll: was a combined seaplane and land-based air base. The major focal points were the seaplanes, while the airstrip was primarily built in order to facilitate the fighters and bombers staging through from Kwajalein and Roi-Namur to Torwa.

Majuro on the Majuro Atoll: was a seaplane base for smaller seaplanes.

Mili on the Mili Atoll: Up to the beginning of 1943, Mili was a forwarded air-look-out station, but after the fall of Tarawa in the Gilbert Islands in 1943, the base was transformed into a major air base for land-based fighters and bombers. As a result of this build-up, the base on Majuro was phased out.

Roi- Namur on the Kwajalein Atoll: The air base commanded all the other air bases in the Marshall and Gilbert Islands region..

Enewetak on the Enewetak Atoll: The former fuel-storage depot had just been turned into an air field and look-out station when it was attacked by the advancing US forces in 1944.

Apart from a single air-craft carrier attack in the early part of 1942, the bases were left relatively undisturbed by the war. Not until late 1943, when the US forces commenced the Marshall Island campaign under the code name "Flintlock", did the bases come under heavy fire. This continued until March 1944, when the bases on Majuro, Kwajalein and Eniwetok were captured from the Japanese. Majuro was attractive from a strategic point of view. The former Japanese base is conveniently located between the bypassed bases and could also serve as a staging point for airplanes from Gilbert Islands and Kwajalein.

The remaining Japanese bases remained isolated until the end of the war. Between February 1944 and August 1945 - that is 18 months - these bases were left isolated in the
Majuro and Kwajalein were turned into
and supply bases. Although the bases were kept neutral through daily US strafing and
bomb runs, new untrained pilots and fighter planes were also sent over the bypassed
itions until they
apan.

surrendered. Most soldiers had died from starvation and diseases. The bases were
d stroyed from a military point of view in early 1944, and later, as a result of daily
strafing and bombings from ships and airplanes. The first attacks in 1944 primarily
anese
ities, and
racks and other buildings.

Torwa	Jalwoj		Mile	Total
	3148	34508,7		15282,5 tons

The remaining structures and sites on the bypassed
follows:

Category	Type		Jalwoj	Wojja	
Personnel	Buildings		13	16	
	Barracks	7		18	0
		1	0		0
	Kitchens		3	4	
	Laundry	1		2	0
		3	2		3
	Toilet buildings		0	10	
	Hospitals	1		1	0
		5	4		4
	Water tanks		12	40	
Storage	Air-raid shelters	33		8	16
		1	0		0
		1	3		0
	Workshops		0	0	
	Water storage	8		4	0
		3	2		0
	Torpedo assemblies		1	1	
	Ammunition buildings	5		7	3
		4	5		2
	Oil Tanks		0	0	
Transportation	Vehicles		2	3	
	Trains	2		1	2

	Piers	2	1	2	1	
	Ships	1	2	1	1	
Communication	Radio buildings	1	2	2	0	
		4	0		0	
Defense		2	1		1	
	Fire control		0	3		
	Range finders	2		1	0	
		3	1		5	
	Anti tank ditches and	2	0		1	
	Pill boxes		6	23		
	Block houses	5		5	0	
		8	7		4	
	Observation bu kers	2		0	0	
	25 mm Anti-aircraft	3		1	0	
		0	1		0	
	Other Anti Aircraft		0	6		
	Army Howitzers	4		0	0	
		0		5	0	
	emplacements.					
		0	0		0	
	8 cm Ships gun		1	0		
	Armored tanks	0		0	0	
		5		6	4	
	guns					
		0		0	0	
	emplacements.					
		3	0		0	
	15 cm Coast defense guns		0	6		
	Other Coast defense guns	0		0	11	
	Air-Control centers	1		2	0	
		2	2		2	
	Air plane reve ments	11		0	5	
		2	0		3	
	Seaplane ramps/aprons			1	0	
	Fighter planes	12		0	7	
	Bomber planes	5		0	4	Bettys"
	Dive bombers		0	0		"Vals"
		0	1		0	Kawanishi H8
		0	0		1	Bell 39

As the figure shows, the number of structures and sites differs from base to base. Thus it reflects a varied picture of what is left today. Judging from the remains built in concrete, there is no doubt that the best and most carefully designed base is the one on Maloelap, while the base on Mili was more poorly designed with respect to concrete

buildings, as it was constructed at a time during the war when Japanese supply lines were unstable and about to be cut off.

It is obvious that the material military structures on the bypassed bases only represent a small part of what was originally there. All wooden structures are missing as a result of war, time and human activity. As a matter of fact, only one wooden structure from the Japanese period in Micronesia is left. That is a warehouse located on the former seaplane base in Majuro. The house is now standing in Delap, a busy and crowded part of Majuro on the Majuro Atoll. When the site was visited in 1995, it was rather battered and worn, and it is doubtful if it is still standing today. Sites and structures made of concrete, on the other hand, are in a better condition, although all are marked by traces of the war: as a result of shelling and bombing, they appear as ruins or they appear with bombcraters and signs of strafing. On this background, it is fairly easy to get an impression of the former bases. Structures made of metal, that is, primarily airplanes, cars, engines and guns of different calibers, can also be seen on the former bases, although on some they are missing. Hardly any of these movable objects were located *in situ* as they were piled together in the postwar clearings or, later, sold as scrap or souvenirs.

In spite of this, the bases function as perfect time capsules for an archaeological study of the Pacific war. On other atolls in the Pacific, the former battle fields are turned into nicely kept parks and recreational areas where the guns and other structures are fitted in, almost like harmless pieces of art.

The former military bases and sites have, on the other hand, a limited interest for the local Marshallese population who live on the atolls. And yet they do profit from them.

Wherever convenient, they move into the former fortified buildings. The blockhouses, ammunition buildings and radio stations should be mentioned as examples of sites which are inhabited and used as homes, churches and typhoon shelters. Airplanes are stripped in order to use the metal in houses and grenade boxes and drop tanks are used for water storage.

Although many East Asian and Pacific nations were involved in the Second World War, the war in the Pacific was basically a war between the USA and Japan, and has, as such, only meaning for the history of these nations. The literature on the war in the Marshall Islands is limited from the Japanese side. Books have been published about the Japanese presence on the bypassed atoll. These publications, however, are mainly kept in Japanese and are thus written for a limited audience, while US historians have published numerous books on the war in the Pacific.

The inhabitants of the Marshall Islands were not involved in the war as such. Instead they took part in it in a rather involuntary way. The events that took place more than 50 years ago are not an integral part of the culture, but they are remembered by those who suffered during the war.

Consequently, most of those studying the World War Two sites on these atolls are not the local population, but foreign scholars or veterans from both sides, who were there as young men.

Although several attempts have been made after the war to clean up and remove the symbols of war, most of them are still in place. The question is: what should be preserved and for what reasons?

One good reason is that many of the sites are still usable today:

- The former airstrips are being used by Air Marshall
- Piers in the lagoons can be used for larger fishing ships
- Certain buildings can be used for inhabitation areas
- Certain sites can be used for typhoon shelters

Buildings made of concrete do not easily disintegrate, even though they are being exposed to weather or are being washed out into the sea. Already now, the bases and the sites are threatened by several factors:

- Environmental decay.(e.g.decomposition and deterioration, shore-line retreat)
- Physical planning (e.g. infrastructure, construction, expansion of settlements)
- General theft and removal of artifacts for the purpose of selling
- Unwise local management decisions

For the Marshallese, the military structures have no historical significance and they are not imbedded in the historical consciousness . The question is, however, whether the former bases can be utilized to generate income for the Marshall Islands?. The republic is part of the former trust territories, which now, under the compact of free Nations receive US funding until the year 2001, when the compact runs out.

Here a real cultural barrier to further development: Although formally the Marshall Islands is a democracy, the country is under traditional rule by an ancient clan system. As a result, it is virtually impossible to point out target areas for the development of tourism as all the land is owned by a certain clan or family. Communal areas are not a tradition. Naturally, this poses severe problems regarding the work of devising an overall strategy for the conservation and preservation of the cultural environment of which the bases are also a part. Lately, voluminous master plans have been prepared for the Cultural Environment of the Marshall Islands. They are written by and for non-Marshallese and there is no doubt about the good intentions. The results, however, are meager and will continue to be so, as long as the local community remains uninvolved. A future objective will be to inform the locals and make them to understand that they can benefit from the bases.