

STORIES FROM MID-PACIFIC 1971 – 1976

As told by Lee Early, February 2019

The dark shadows just below the surface were unmistakable. Dozens of them. SHARKS! We were on our final approach to Midway island. At touch down - another surprise – Goony Birds. Midway was full of them. Midway is the only place they live. Look – another Air Micronesia 727 jet was sitting on the runway with its nose caved in. It had hit a Goony Bird on takeoff. Our flight was the last one Air Micronesia would make to Midway as a fueling stop on its way across the Pacific. This was going to be a very interesting trip, if we survived.

A month before Leah and I were asked to join our EI/ICA Director and his globetrotting team in an upstairs room of a deep-dish pizza restaurant on the near north side of Chicago. The team had just returned from a world tour. In fairly short order, Leah and I learned about our new assignment to Majuro. What? Where? Majuro is a coral atoll. What's an atoll? Flabbergasted is a timid word for how we felt at the moment.



Lee was to fly to Majuro to relieve a colleague who was the manager's assistant at the Kwajalein Importing and Trading Company. KITCO was the largest publicly held company in the Marshall Islands, Trust Territory of the Pacific. WOW – I dreamed of being a south sea trader ever since I had seen "South Pacific" on stage. Then came the description of the place. Majuro was the district center on the Marshall Islands. 1,000,000 square miles of ocean with 26 inhabited atolls and 2 high islands. Where is it? Fly from Chicago to LA and then to Hawaii for overnight. Then, fly to Midway to refuel for the flight to Kwajalein and then to Majuro. The plane would continue to Pohnpei and Truck, then Guam and Saipan. So, Majuro is roughly half way between Hawaii and Guam.

Majuro is a coral atoll with a lagoon 10 miles wide and 30 miles long. It has one paved road from one end, Uliga to the other end at Laura. It is the longest paved road in the Marshalls. In constructing it, the US Navy plugged up the dozen or so small islets to make the road. Normally, there was a space between these islets allowing the lagoon to flush itself with each high and low tide. Consequently, waste began to accumulate in the lagoon – beer cans, plastic containers, nylon rope and fishing gear and female sanitary napkins. The place was a dump. The arm pit of the Pacific. Oh, great. And here we come. Mike Huff, a teacher, Larry White, CPA and Lee Early the Herby Goldfarb of the group. (character in The Milagro Beanfield War). We were to meet the outgoing colleagues and couple who stayed to teach a school on Rong Rong.

Back on Midway, we boarded our flight. Next stop – Kwajalein. It's the largest atoll in the Pacific. 75 miles long and about 20 miles wide. It is the down range missile tracking and defense base for the U.S. Military. Rockets launched from Vandenberg in California were shot down by missiles from Kwajalein. We were allowed to deplane to stretch our legs but could not go past the restricted area outside the terminal. We got off the plane - - "Look there – what's that?" The giant clam was big enough for Larry to sit inside it for a photo. That is one big clam. What had we gotten ourselves into?

After another hour on the plane, we arrived on Majuro on Saturday. Our colleagues left on the returning flight on Sunday. Monday morning began the painful, beautiful, frightening and gratifying adventure of this Texas boy's life.

I was the management assistant to Fred Narune. Fred was the Marshallese general manager of KITCO. As I sat down at my desk, there was a knock on the door. Through a translator, I was told I had better get down to the District Court. KITCO was being sued by three creditors who had hired a lawyer. Since we were not represented, the judge was going to award the creditors a default judgement. That could shut us down.

When I got to the court house, the judge had indeed issued the judgement. I went to his office. I introduced myself and told the judge I had just arrived and was sure we could turn KITCO around. I just needed six months. The judge told me to go get the attorney. "He's probably having lunch at Ms. Bing's café and ask him to accompany you back here. I'll wait."

Sure enough, he was and we did. The judge then told us both – "Paul, you have your default judgement. Just don't file it. Give these guys six months to turn this around and pay you." The attorney agreed. So, we now have six months. Six months to do – what, exactly?



The first order of business was to collect the money due KITCO for its last field trip on the Militobi (photo left), the copra freighter operated and supplied by KITCO. We were owed \$80,000 give or take for operating expenses and the tons of copra pre-sold to the United Micronesian Development authority. There was only one problem. There were no books. Larry, the CPA and I

had to “recreate” the books. (Don’t ask.) We did and finally got paid.

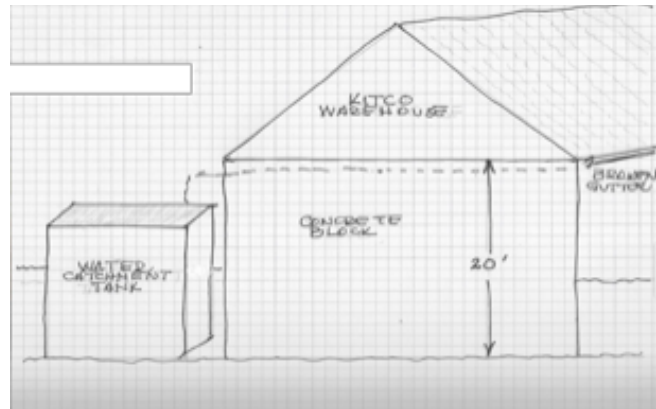
We learned that the rules and regulations gave way to, not only to our innovation and creativity, but we learned the Marshallese culture was alive and well in the midst of opposing cultural norms we brought to the island. That culture, at times, was directly opposite from our way of doing things. Their culture, for instance, was a culture of taking care of everyone. If your neighbor came to you asking for a can of beans, the culture dictated you give him a can of beans. This was in direct conflict with our culture of for-profit business. That is one reason the Marshallese hired non-Marshallese store managers. They could say “no”.

KITCO in the meantime was in deep trouble. It had not made payroll in six months. It had not paid taxes in two years. Employees were taking food off the shelves in our general merchandise store in lieu of wages. Consequently, the store was bear. Can goods were so old the labels had come off. Inventory was nonexistent. If there had been bankruptcy laws, KITCO would have qualified five times over.

One of the priorities we faced was housing. The three new staff were housed above the KITCO store. Two bedrooms, one living room, a kitchen and a toilet. The shower was connected to the water catchment system laced with sea water and dispensed through a ½” pipe. We used the 55-gallon drum outside that caught rain water. So, each morning, in my shorts, I poured dipping rain water over my head for a shower. The Marshallese began to wonder whether or not we were nuts. Shortly thereafter their suspicions were confirmed.

The building that housed the KITCO general store and our living quarters also served as a rain water catchment system. Rain fell on the roof, and drained down gutters running the length of the building and down into a large concrete water tank. The tank was empty. The gutter running along the roof line had collapsed. Well – no wonder the catchment tank was empty. The solution was obvious and easy. Just reconnect the gutters.

Mike Huff and I decided we could fix the water system. The gutter runs the length of the building and had collapsed where the gutter ran across the hip of the building and down into the tank. Just reconnect the gutter. However, we had no ladder. The hip was 20' off the ground. No problem. We just started stacking wooden shipping pallets, one on top of another, 20' up. We would stack several pallets, Mike would climb up six feet or so and I would hand him another pallet. I don't recall how Mike would get the new pallet stacked on top of the stack while he was standing on the stack. We got several more pallets stacked up to a staggering altitude of 7'. It was hot, we were bushed and it was noon. Time for lunch and a cold beer.



After lunch Mike and I went back to the job site to discover some of our KITCO staff had dug a trench from the downspout, underground and up into the 8' high tank. 20 feet down, 30 feet underground and up into the tank. Capillary action took care of the solution where a couple of "rebellies", stacking pallets couldn't. Rebellies was the Marshallese word for white, hairless people. *Lesson: The Marshallese had lived and navigated the Pacific for generations. They knew a thing or two about water.* The event also shed light on our own naiveté. We learned that there is such a thing as intentional naiveté. Sometime it's best to decide not to know what you think you know.

Another priority was to try to get the Marshallese off a barter economy to a cash economy. The major employer was the government. Women, almost exclusively women, would sit in front of their typewriters for eight hours a day and every once in a while, hit a key. What money-making industries and small businesses could we start?

That question was always in the front of our minds from day one.

The first weekend Mike and I couldn't resist that blue, calm lagoon. We went for a swim. We had goggles and swim trunks. So, we swam just below the surface looking down at the lagoon floor. The fish were amazing – all sizes and colors. We also noticed an ugly looking slug, about the size of a large cucumber. What in the world were they? After some research we discovered Sea Cucumbers or Trepang were a food for several Asian people. They were getting their Trepang from Ceylon (called Sri Lanka today). The Ceylon variety was tiny. It was several ounces in size. "Our" sea cucumbers weighed eight to ten pounds! We had hit the Mother Lode. Now, how to sell them.



Our research told us there were two major markets. One in Hong Kong and one in Japan. Hong Kong folks liked their Trepang whole, boiled and dried. The Japanese preferred a length slit open, emptied and dried. Mike and I grabbed a plastic pail, our goggles and away we hurried to catch six or eight and send samples to Hong Kong and Japan.

The Sea Cucumbers had a different notion. The first one we grabbed cut loose emitting several strings of “noodles”. They were long, sticky, white noodle looking mechanism of defense. We soon learned the stuff was almost impossible to get off our arms. We caught several, keeping ourselves “up wind” or up current with the stringy noodles flowing behind our catch.

The plan was to fix four the Hong Kong way and four the Japanese way. Back in our kitchen, we put a large pot on the stove to boil some water. Since the Hong Kong way did not require gutting the thing, we decided to boil them whole and then dry them. The water was boiling. We put four cucumbers into the pot, put the lid on it and sat down for a beer while we waited for them to cook.

Several minutes later and having finished only half of our beer – the pot exploded, blew the lid off the pot and blew Trepang all over the kitchen. It took us several days to clean the sticky spaghetti off the walls. Oh well, we decided to forget the Hong Kong way for now and cleaned four others of the eight Trepang in preparation for drying for the Japanese market.

The drying process was interesting. The KITCO store was a large building with a corrugated aluminum roof. Someone had put up a close line on the roof to dry cloths. Perfect. We hung up our four cooked cucumbers on the cloths line to dry.

It rained solid for four days. The Trepang turned brown, then green, then slithered off the line into four slimy piles on the roof. The Marshallese had their suspicions confirmed – these guys were nuts. And that was the end of our Trepang period.

We were now slightly desperate to get fresh meat and vegetables in the store. Not only were our employees hungry – we were too.

On one of his trips to Majuro, our Director noticed our large refrigerated trailer sitting in back of the store. It was empty because the refrigerator unit had broken down months before. We needed a replacement for the whole unit to get the trailer functioning. About a month later the Director came up with a refrigerator unit, flown in from LA to Hawaii and then had Air Micronesia clear the front of their 727 to make room for the unit and flew it to Majuro. Several members of our staff had the unit installed and working in no time. Now we had a storage facility for fresh meat. We just didn't have any.

About this time – six months on – our Director had made another visit. It was time to bring the wives to Majuro. Kathleen White and Leah arrived soon thereafter. Not long after their arrival several more staff were assigned. As the staff grew, activities heated up.

KITCO operated field trips on a freighter called the Militobi. Field trips operated as a closed accounting system and were money makers. We stocked the ship with \$10,000 in trade goods and \$5,000 in cash. The ship left with a KITCO employee for the outer islands. Upon arrival in Ebon for instance, the local Marshallese sold their copra to KITCO. They were paid in cash. We had a standing contract with UMDA (United Micronesia Development Authority) in which they bought all our copra for a fixed amount per pound. We purchased the copra from local Marshallese for a price a bit less than the fixed selling price we were to get from UMDA. With the cash from the sale of their copra the Marshallese purchased the trade goods they needed for a month or so – until the next field trip arrived. So, at the end of the trip, the ship returned full of copra and no trade goods. We made a profit off the copra and a profit from the sale of our trade goods. Each trip would be closed out on the books. We tacked what went out and what came back with each trip. That's a closed system. It was clean, quick and profitable, accounting wise.

We arranged a \$10,000 loan from the Bank of Hawaii on Guam to finance one trip. When the ship returned, we paid off the loan and made a new draw from the bank for another \$10,000. We were in business.

With an expanded staff we brainstormed how to get fresh vegetables and meat on the shelves.

On the flights to Guam to visit our banker, the plane left Majuro to Kwajalein to Pohnpei to Truk (now named Chuuk) and to Guam. Pohnpei is a high island. Its estimated rain fall on the top of the mountain is 365" a year. It is a lush island surrounded by a barrier reef. Pohnpei had a farmer's co-op that bought and sold produce. Bingo – fresh vegetables.

Back on Majuro we made a list of vegetables. The list was broken down into what we wanted on the Air Micronesia flights from the west going east to Majuro once a week and what we wanted on a flight once a month. We gave the list to Mike Huff and put him on the flight going west to Pohnpei. On the list was 500 pounds of potatoes.

Upon arrival on Pohnpei, Mike went to the co-op manager and presented him with the list. The manager scratched his head and said: "Five hundred pounds of potatoes?" Mike answered "Yes please". The manager chuckled and said: "Well, I suppose we could cut one up for you." Potatoes on Pohnpei were harvested by bull dozers. They typically weigh 2,000 pounds each. Never the less, we had our supply of fresh vegetables. Now, for the fresh meat.

Since World War II the Marshallese had done very little fishing. The Japanese introduced them to rice and it was now something they could not do without. Fishing dropped to almost nothing. We did not possess the skill or equipment to launch a fishing industry to supply fresh fish to the store. But wait – there were shark in these waters, even in the lagoon. Anybody could catch a shark, couldn't they?

We went to work. Dan Tuecke, one of our newer staff members at the time, fashioned a steel hook, several in fact. We then bought some steel leader. Cut into six-foot lengths, we tied the leader to a hook on one end and a 300-pound test monofilament line on the other end. Then, we tied the line to a Japanese float ball. We made up about six rigs – float ball, line, leader and hook. What to put on the hook was easy. Shark liked blood, right? With our 5-pound plastic bucket, we went around the island and collected pig guts, chicken guts and a couple of fish heads. We now had the rigs and the bait. Next, a boat. We located a Marshallese with a small outboard motor boat with a small cabin. He agreed to take us out in the lagoon, fishing for shark.

Lee bought the beer. Dan bought some work gloves and a machete. Loaded, we set out. We went about half way across the lagoon – 15 miles or so, past the ship channel entrance to the Majuro dock and began dropping our rigs. After dropping the last rig, we circled back to the first one we'd dropped. The first one – nothing. The second one – nothing. The third one – nothing. But on the forth one, we had a big one. Why? What was the difference? What was different about the forth rig? It had never occurred to us that a shark had never met a pig or a chicken but, they surly knew about fish. The forth rig had been baited with a fish head.

We caught our first shark. Dan was hauling it in, hand over fist. It was about 8 feet long and very unhappy that we'd interrupted his meal. What we soon

realized was that we did not want an angry 8-foot shark in our 12-foot motor boat. So, Dan did not bring it on board until he'd killed it. Holding the leader in one hand and the machete in the other, Dan began to beat the shark. Several whacks on his head did not even crease the skin. It did however further enrage the shark. Dan beat that shark until he could no longer lift his arm.

Being raised in the Japanese occupation, the Marshallese boat driver looked on without saying a word. When Dan was exhausted, the Marshallese asked if he could borrow the machete. He then lifted the shark's head and struck it under the chin. One blow and the shark was brought on board. None of the other rigs, baited with land animal blood and guts produced a shark. So, with our catch in hand, we headed back to Majuro. Just before we left our fishing spot for the return trip, a storm kicked up.

The gale was a doozie. Three guys in a 12-foot outboard motor boat and one dead shark crossing the opening to the lagoon from the ocean was a passage for a horror movie. The waves were much taller than our little boat. The motor came out of the water on the downward slope of a swell. But we made it.

Fresh meat! We now had fresh meat. Our colleagues could hardly wait to eat fresh shark. It was awful. It was not eatable. We quickly learned that shark urinate through the pours of their skin. YUCK! We deposited what was left in the reefer van with its new refrigerator unit and forgot it.

A couple of months later our food budget was in a state of famine. We were hungry. That putrid shark was looking pretty good after someone remembered that we'd put it in the reefer. We got the shark from the reefer and cut it up to fry. What a shock! After a bit of aging, it was delicious. All the urine had leached out and the meat tasted like white fish. It was a firm but flakey delicacy. Bingo! Real fresh meat. Let's go get some more.

Dan made up some more shark catching rigs. We knew what bait the sharks liked so, all we needed was a boat. During construction of the airport the contractor abandoned a small light tug boat. We latched onto it and got it running. It had a large marine engine that was covered in oil and therefore did not have a speck of rust on it. We quickly put together a loan proposal



package to buy the tug and gear for more fishing rigs. We also had a shark jaw mounted on a palm tree board as a gift to the High Commissioner. Lee was off to Saipan to see the High Commissioner and the Micronesian Development Authority for a loan. In order to get to Saipan I spent the night in Guam. That evening marked the opening premier of "Jaws". What a stroke of luck. We now hold the record for the quickest loan approval in the Trust Territory's history.

We named the tug Baco Baco – shark in Marshallese. To celebrate we hosted a dinner and invited Kabua Kabua, the king of kings, the District Administrator, Amada Kabua (remember that name) and some honored guests. Just days before the celebration we learned that eating shark was taboo to the Marshallese. Sharks eat humans and to eat a shark might mean you were eating your grandmamma. So, we cut up the shark in bite size chunks and marinated it in all the spices we could get our hands on.

The meat was a hit at the celebration. Then, Amata Kabua's fork stopped in midair. Raising his head, fork in midair he looked at me and said "Baco?" The jig was up. He knew. He made a sly grin and ate it anyway. We were one of the first commercial shark fishing ventures in the Pacific. Today, shark meat, looking fresh, wrapped in see through plastic wrap, is sold in major grocery chains.

In our first year KITCO made a \$1,000,000 profit. Our staff grew by leaps and bounds to a total of 30 folks. Among the newbies came Don Baker from Australia. His resume listed one of his skills as the ability to see through a piece of equipment like a MRI sees through a human body.



A prominent merchant on the atoll owned a retail store and a field trip ship. The ship, the Tatimi Maru was stranded in the Kwajalein lagoon. On the far end, 70 miles from the Kwajalein islet north across the lagoon sat the ship.

The crew had abandoned the ship and the only person remaining was the engineer. Enter Don Baker. We put Don on the plane and flew him to Kwajalein islet and then by boat 70 miles to the far end of the atoll. After a week with no contact, we began to worry. Then, one afternoon, the KITCO short wave radio began to crackle. The caller was breaking up in the static. "This %*%&\$\$ Baker calling KITCO. ^%*%^\$ in hour." Good grief! It was Don Baker on the Tatimi Maru. He and the engineer had rigged up a fire on the rear deck and had

made an engine part for the ship, installed it and were sailing it back to Majuro – the two of them. This man, in addition to his skills was observably a bold risk taker! They made it and anchored in its home port in the Majuro lagoon.

With the expanded staff we set out getting this atoll on a cash footing. We opened a business school with an eight or so donated IBM Selectric typewriters. Larry White performed audits on more than two dozen stores and taxi owners. Don Baker and a couple of staff opened the Multi-Purpose Repair Center. Nancy Boyia and some of our women opened the Breadfruit Tree, a store featuring deep fried breadfruit snacks, something resembling a banana, pandanas nuggets and fresh coconut ala mode.



The Majuro pre-school was opened. KITCO won the Toyota dealership and the Seiko dealership. The Trans Atoll Service Company was formed. It was a buying co-op made up of twenty-four local merchants, including KITCO.



About this time we had landed the shore agent for Dawa Shipping Company. The first ship created quite a stir. It was almost twice as long as our dock, three times the length of the Militobi. The only trade goods for TASC came from the west – Japan, Australia and

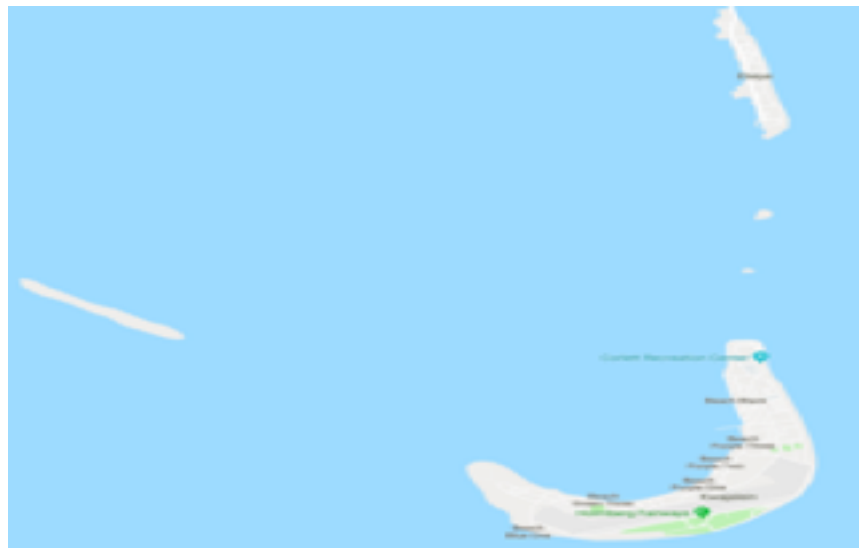
Hong Kong. We wanted to get goods from the U.S, and Hawaii. There was no shipping service from the east – except to Kwajalein. The Matson Line had a large ocean-going tug that would tow the hull of an unfinished cargo ship full of trade goods for the downrange rocket base folks on Kwajalein.

TASK placed an order of sugar and trade goods from some stateside suppliers. They were to use Matson Line out of Long Beach to Hawaii and then on to Kwajalein.

The CEO of TASK made a call on the military commander on Kwajalein. We got permission to trans-ship a portion of the cargo off the Matson Line ship to our ship, using the Navy port and equipment. All we needed was a ship.

We borrowed a ship from Amada Kabua and sailed it to Kwaj. We loaded our ship off the Matson Line barge and sailed back to Majuro. Alas, we had no shore equipment to off load the cargo. We did it by hand. Of course, Lee was off island at the time taking care of some crucial business on Guam. He was good at that.

We need to say a word or two about Ebeye. Ebeye is a small islet in the large Kwajalein atoll. The largest islet housed the military base and government contracted engineers and staff. The Kwajalein islet is "little America", complete with fast food restaurants and the AAFES run PX. The islet is the southernmost



part of the atoll. Ebeye is roughly 3 miles from the Kwajalein islet. It is Ebeye where all the local workers lived. It is Ebeye where KITCO had a retail store and a bar. Since we were KITCO employees, we were allowed to deplane on Kwajalein and take the water ferry over to Ebeye. All the Marshallese workers on Kwajalein had to board the ferry each morning to go to Kwajalein and be on it in the evening back to Ebeye. Missed the ferry and you spent some time in jail.

Ebeye has been quarantined for Hepatitis since the late 60's. Intended to house Marshallese workers, the Navy had built some housing for about 100 or so workers. They did not plan on the fact that the Marshallese had strong family relationships. With one wage earner in the family, the whole family was invited to come to Ebeye. The population exploded to 1,000. The "facilities" were over loaded. But they did provide a private place for young couples to – couple.

Consequently the fresh water lens floating above the sea water just below the surface became polluted. There was no potable water. Therefore, the Navy supplies fresh water each day with a water barge from the nearby Kwajalein islet. That cost the Marshallese a bundle each day for fresh water. Hummm, you say – “Where did Kwajalein get its fresh water?” Well, they had an airstrip that caught rain water that was stored in water catchment lagoons. Next question – at low tide you could walk on the reef from Kwajalein to Ebeye, why not lay a water pipe between the two islets? The cost of the pipe was about a week's worth of water barges.

The only “hotel” in town was owned by one of our TASK member merchants on Majuro. It is where the men from Kwajalein rented a room to house their Marshallese girlfriends. You get the picture. The place was a mess, and that, is an understatement.

Back on Majuro the “Blue Shirts”, as we were called, began to be called on for all kinds of services. It was no surprise when one evening a Marshallese man came to us looking for an American attorney. Dan's neighbor, the one with the pigs, the king of kings had killed his wife in a drunken stupor. (The king, not the wife.) The Marshallese law requires a Marshallese judge to sit beside the American judge in all cases brought before the court. We found one but, I doubt he ever showed up. The court turned the case and judgement over to the Marshallese judge. The American judge had the good sense not to sentence the King in this case. The ruling from the Marshallese judge was to forbid the King from ever having another wife. That was a harsh sentence in their culture.



Then one dark and lonely night a couple of guys from LA landed in the Majuro lagoon. They had “sailed” a 1968 Corvette engine powered tuna boat to our shores. “Tuna boat” is a bit miss leading. It was a small boat with a cabin and hydraulic tuna pullers mounted on deck. Something

like the photo. It was a sweet little boat that could race when the fishing was off.

Our visitors anchored their boat and went ashore. That night a storm kicked up. The boat was on a short anchor leash. The wind pushed the boat to the length of its tether and the bow dipped below the water resulting in the boat filling up

with water and it sank. News travels fast. We went down to the lagoon that morning and offered some help to get the boat off the bottom. Our guest said "No thanks." They finally got it up and onto the shore. Salt water and Corvette engines do not get along very well. It was ruined.

A couple of days later, while Lee was off island on Guam, our visitors came to us and offered to sell the boat for \$2,500. Don Baker looked it over and made the mechanical diagnosis of the decade. Don knew that the only thing the boat needed was a new or rebuilt carburetor for the Corvette engine. He had the specs on what he needed and sent me a telegram on Guam. I bought a new carburetor for \$80. For \$2,580 we had us a good as new tuna boat. Such a deal. I got back just in time to watch our maiden cruise. The boat was powerful and would be our new fresh fish tuna catching industry. After the short demonstration cruise, Don Baker took it out of the lagoon into the open ocean. He got a kick of jumping waves. The boat would climb one side of a wave, clearing the water and landing past the wave. Great fun. When Don returned to the dock, he notified us that the boat had sprung a wee leak. Infuriated with this news, Don was assigned to keep watch that night to make sure the boat didn't sink. The next morning, the boat was resting on the bottom next to the dock. Don Baker never knew how close he came to feeding the fishes.

Only one thing to do. Go get the cherry picker, throw some line under the boat and haul it to the surface. I volunteered to out the lines under the boat. The cherry picker gently lifted the boat off the bottom so I could place the ropes under the hull and remove the temporary grasp we'd used to get the boat up a tad. I successfully placed the ropes under the hull and the cherry picker began lifting the boat. The boat weighed several thousand pounds but, filled with sea water it weighed several times that. With each foot of upward pull the rear wheels of the cherry picker would come off the ground. Another foot or two and the whole rig, cherry picker and all would join the boat and Lee on the bottom. We finally got the thing up and onto shore. That was the end of our tuna fishing period.

Several months after our arrival on Majuro and after the wives had arrived, more staff showed up as well as our kids. Marshallese loved kids. One family on the staff brought their very young son – Thor. He was a Viking through and through. Stout, blond, serious and beefy. He came trudging down the street one day, eating something. Dan stopped him and ask "What are you eating there Thor?" "A cookie" was the reply. Dan asked, "Where'd you get the cookie?" Thor, "The King gave it to me." The kid was adorable and a tank on two legs.

The Marshallese culture was a giving culture. If a married woman had three children and had a sister and the sister did not have any children, the mother would give the sister one of her children to raise.

Lee was nearing the end of a trip to Saipan and Guam when Hammer DeRoburt arrived on his freighter. The Honorable



DeRoburt was the President of Naru. His ship was full of rice – white gold in the



Pacific. KITCO had no rice. DeRoburt in town was the occasion for a state celebration. Let the party begin. Oscar DeBrum, the District Administrator hosted DeRoburt and knew of KITCO's shortage of rice. DeRoburt's ship was loaded with rice. DeRoburt thought he had a contract for the rice to sell it to the United Micronesia Development Authority. (UNDA). He must have gotten his wires crossed because UNDA would not buy the rice.

So, Oscar and Amada Kabua made a visit to the TASC office with a proposition. Naru would

sell all the rice to TASC on consignment. We did not have to pay for the rice until we sold it – one 50kilo bag at a time.

After the sale and after the rice was nestled into the KITCO warehouse, a corner of which was the TASC office, Lee returned to the atoll. Wonderful! We had rice. Lots of rice.

That was Sunday. We discovered our colleague was missing during the role call. We will call her Sarah. There was no Sarah present. The men on our staff swung

into action. The men, Dan, Don, Roger, John and Lee gathered in the TASC office to cogitate over what to do. We were deep into the discussion when Leah walked in. "What are you doing?" she loudly asked. "Get up and go find her!" End of discussion.

The search began at Oscar DeBrum's house. It was a mess. Wild parties tend to look like this. Bottles everywhere, none of which were upright and on tables. They were scattered all over the floors. Next stop were the bars – both of them. The KITCO bar was populated with the regulars. The Reef however, was the venue for Oscar, Amada, DeRoburt and friends. Sarah was there too, draped on DeRoburt's arm and three sheets to the wind. Dan invited Sarah to the dance floor while Lee engaged DeRoburt and Oscar in conversation. Sarah was scared half to death at this point. Leah and Joan took Sarah to the restroom and then to the car.

Several months later, we'd sold maybe a third of the rice stacked in the warehouse. The other two thirds became a high-rise home for the local rats. They had eaten their way through the bags, spilling all over the pile and making a perfect place for baby rats. We now had several tons of rat-infested broken bags of rice. Our staff spent the evenings sifting through the loose rice, killing and discarding the rats and bagging the rice into small paper bags for sale. A year later we still had rice and rats.

KITCO was growing and needed money to pay employees, restock the store, keep the copra field trip ships running, buying Toyota inventory and acquiring equipment for the Multi-Purpose Repair Center. We prepared a SBA loan package for our banker friend, Mike Orr and the Bank of Hawaii. With the added endorsement of the UMDA and the guarantee of the SBA, the bank had a very bankable loan package. Mike had just one problem preventing him from approving the loan. KITCO still had several thousand creditors, any one or group of them, could hire a lawyer, swoop in and get a default judgement against KITCO once it had the loan and had assets to attach. So, Mike told us we had to secure a promissory note from 25% of the 100 creditors. They would have to agree to accept payment of their bills over a five-year period and not sue KITCO as long as those payments were made on time. Okay, we'll see what we could do. We had 25% sign up within the month. So, back on the plane to Guam.

Nice job was Mike's response but, the home office in Hawaii wanted 50% of the creditors on the dotted line. Back to Majuro. A month later, we had 50%. Back to Guam. Well, says Mike, what we really need is 100% of the creditors to sign up.

We found ourselves a “junk yard dog” lawyer and asked Mike to notify our creditors of a meeting to be held on Guam two months out. Our lawyer prepared the promissory notes for the creditors to sign. It was a five-year promissory note with NO interest. Our lawyer had some chutzpah to pull that off.

The meeting was called to order. There were a dozen creditors there. There was one group of East Indian merchants doing business out of Hong Kong. They were one tough, ruthless, and stubborn bunch. Hell no they wouldn't sign a five-year note with no interest. What did we think they were, etc, etc, etc. They called me and Fred Narrun, the KITCO general manager all sorts of names. We agreed. Yep, we are all those nasty things. Now, will you sign the note? NO was the response. At that point our lawyer got up and motioned for us to follow him out the door. We were horrified. What the hell was he doing. All those guys wanted was a 1% interest charge for cryin our loud. We all sat down in an office down the hall and our attorney told us to just wait. Half an hour later we were summoned back to the meeting room. The rebellious creditors had agreed to 0% interest. The notes were signed and the SBA loan funded.

Things were moving on all fronts. The field trips were very profitable and the closed system made the accounting precise. We needed more field trips, more freighters and captains. Along came an opportunity. Let's call him Captain. Captain owned a small freighter. A dilapidated, run down dump is what it was. It was sea worthy in a very loose use of the term. It could go to Arno however. Arno was 10 miles from Majuro. It could be seen peeking just above the horizon from our kitchen window. Ok, let's do it. We provided the trade goods and \$10,000 in cash to buy copra.

Did I tell you about the Trickster? Leto was his mythical name. He was a favorite of the Marshallese. The Trickster was the mythical story of how the Marshallese had made it this far into history. Captain must have been the embodiment of Leto because he and his ship disappeared over night. Poof. No Captain, no boat and no money. Thus ended our field trip joint venture period.

A second human development consult was held. It was different from the first one in that the first consult ended with a list of “miracles”. The second consult changed the process from miracles to strategic proposals and objectives. One of the objectives matured into an economic development fund calling for \$2,800,000 in a grant from the US Government.

This project called for several trips to Washington DC to lobby congressmen – they were all men then. We were reminded that there were no votes coming from the Marshall Islands. This fact hindered our efforts and forced us to call on a lot of congressmen and their aides. As it turned out, the aides were the key.

After months and several trips, we got a hearing. Kabua Kabua, Fred Narune a couple of our development team and the Director “testified”. Somehow, our grant was passed. CELEBRATION was a polite way to call the party we had over that announcement. Then the second shock arrived – grant approval was one thing. Appropriations was another. Back to the Hill and several more visits to congressmen. Finally, the appropriations bill passed.

One key element in our grant was vocational training for young men and women that had to be hands on and self-sufficient. Very few Marshallese could afford a tuition for vocational school.



I'm not sure who came up with the idea but, it went something like this: We – the infamous we – would in-kind a LST which I think stands for Landing Craft Tank. The Director had spotted one in Bremerton Ship Yards. It was the USNS Phoenix. (An appropriate name)

So, we flew to Seattle, got permission from the Admiral who called the Captain. He showed us around the ship. The plan was to populate the ship with several dozen trainees, a Marshallese captain and some trainers. We were to in-kind some equipment like metal lathes, table drills and saws and anything that wasn't nailed down. The ship had most of the equipment on board. They had to have equipment in order to fix tanks and the ship which took care of 90% of what we needed. The ship was to leave from Majuro and make a month-long field trip run to the outer islands, collect copra, the sale of which would pay the stipends of the trainees and ship's expenses. It was a rather bold and ingenious idea. We never could quite pull it off.

We found out later that Amada Kabua had fashioned some form of this idea and put into practice. Some years later, after the Republic of the Marshall Islands was formed and Amada Kabua elected as its first President, the ICA made up a bill for services rendered by the Blue Shirts in getting the \$2,800,000 grant passed through congress. David Rebstock flew to Majuro and presented the bill to President Kabua. Amada smiled and said they had already spent the money. One of the programs was for the young men of Majuro to board field trip ships to the outer islands. On each atoll or island the men would salvage the WW II wrecks strewn throughout the new nation. Tons of scrap metal was collected. That was one part of the plan. The second part were the unintended

consequences of collecting the scrap metal. According to Amada, the coconut and the copra production tripled. The soil rid of too much metal turned out to be a strong catalyst for coconut palm trees. Amada also told David that the **lasting legacy of the Blue Shirts was that they had changed the mind-set of the Marshallese from one of being bound by the past to realizing what they could do on their own. We had changed their imaginations.** So, the original idea, with slight alterations, had born fruit after all, even beyond our original intent.