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ABSTRACT

The present educational system in Micronesia has historical roots that can be traced to the United States Naval administration of 1945-47. The Navy, faced with the problem of establishing schools in Micronesia, did not create new institutions. Drawing upon their past experience, they decided to create a secular, coeducational, public school system with compulsory attendance laws, thus establishing the kinds of schools with which they were familiar. The lack of a clear-cut indigenous educational policy resulted in education practices which promoted the rapid Americanization of the Micronesian. By 1951 the system consisted of a six-year elementary program, a three-year intermediate program, and the Pacific Islands Training School, offering communications, general education, and teacher training. Elementary curriculum consisted of English, the vernacular, arithmetic, social studies, art, handicrafts, and gardening; English studies were taken up in the third year and became the medium of instruction. The intermediate schools, geared to both preprofessional and terminal education, offered English, social studies, commercial subjects, industrial arts and vocational training. (Author/JH)

THE LITTLE RED SCHOOLHOUSE IN MICRONESIA: LAYING THE FOUNDATION, 1944-1951

by Donald F. Smith

The formal education system existing in Micronesia to date has historical roots directly traceable to the United States Naval Administration of 1944-1951.[1] During this period, the decision was made to create a secular public school system, coeducational, with universal compulsory attendance. The lack of an established native education policy resulted in practices directed toward rapid Americanization of the islanders through the "little red schoolhouse" tradition transplanted to the Micronesian village.[2] Those practices are strongly reflected today, almost a quarter of a century later, in the island schoolroom.

Officially labeled the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands, Micronesia is one of the least understood of American involvements. The region is an artificial entity consisting of approximately 2,000 islands and atolls, with a population of slightly over 100,000. Three major archipelagoes, the Marshall, Caroline, and Mariana Islands groups, are strung out over an expanse of sea larger than the Continental United States. Within this immense political unit of some three million square miles are 96 widely scattered island groups with a total land surface of less than 700 square miles, an area smaller than either Rhode Island or Delaware. Compared with world totals, Micronesia is of

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[1] The development and impact of the efforts of the Boston Mission (American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions) in the field of education during the mid-nineteenth century remain unexplored for the light they may shed on earlier American foundations. An examination of the Mission's papers in the Harvard Library could assist us in understanding these earlier influences on the educational enterprise in Micronesia.

[2] This distinction could also be applied to the present educational policies in Guam.

microscopic value in terms of resources, population, and land area.[3] Yet in terms of human values, the islands have always ranked high as a testing ground for American policy.

Geography has hindered the development of any effective network of transportation or communication. The hundreds of islets are separated not only by water, but by cultural and linguistic barriers as well. With at least nine distinct languages spoken, communications with the indigenous population, particularly on the outer islands where 90 percent of the people reside, has always been a problem. Logistical support for educational programs is also difficult, the source of supply being over 5,000 miles away in the United States, compounding the problem of procuring school materials.

Originally claimed by the Spanish during the sixteenth century, the islands were never actually administered by Spain except for a brief period during the late nineteenth century.[4] They were sold to Germany in 1899.[5] Occupied by Japan during World War I, the islands were mandated to the Japanese by the League of Nations until caputured in World War II by American forces. Designated a "strategic trust"[6] by the United Nations, the area has been administered by the United States as a trust territory since 1947.

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[3]Military specialists will not necessarily concur with this since "strategically" the area is regarded as the new line of American defense in Asia as we lower our profile in the Philippines and Vietnam.

[4]1886-1899.

[5]As a result of the Spanish-American War and the cession of Guam and the Philippines to the United States, Spain decided to withdraw from the Pacific region and sold her Micronesian possessions to Germany for $4,500,000.

[6]As a strategic trust, the most important modification is that dealing with defense. The whole of the Trust Territory is designated as a strategic area with the United States holding administration or jurisdiction under the United Nations Security Council rather than the General Assembly. While all members of the United Nations are to receive equal social, economic, and commercial treatment within the area, the United States can close the islands at any time, citing the threat to world peace.

Wartime and Postwar Foundations: 1944-1947

During the war years, a paucity of information concerning the native population of the Japanese Mandated Islands created a problem for the military education specialist planning a program for Micronesia. This was compounded by the destruction of an infrastructure that had been built up by the Japanese over a 30-year period. Despite these obstacles, rehabilitative measures designed to re-establish a school system were undertaken. The original directive was generally worded: "It is expected that island and atoll commanders will make provisions for the . . . educational . . . needs of the natives as is practical under present conditions."[7] Despite a lack of policy, resourceful military officers in various island groups undertook to lay the foundations of an education system. The Navy, faced with the problem of establishing schools in the islands, did not create new institutions. Rather, they did what men have always done: They drew upon their past experiences and established the kinds of schools with which they were familiar. Thus, another general directive in late 1945 set forth basic objectives:

> The primary consideration is a system which will benefit the many and which will assume the progressive development of each community along lines which will raise the island standards . . . and which will equip the islanders for conduct of their own government . . . .[8]

In keeping with the democratic ideal of education for all, the occupation forces established a free system of public schools as soon as the Pacific Islands were liberated.

In the Marshall Islands, education officers had schools in operation by the summer of 1944. At the termination of the war in 1945, schools on Majuro

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[7] "Directive for Military Government and Civil Affairs in the Japanese Mandated Islands," July 20, 1944, as cited in Dorothy Richards, U. S. Naval Administration of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1957), p. 693.

[8] J. L. Taylor, "A Pacific Island Adaptation of American Public Schools," School and Society, Vol. 73 (May 12, 1951), p. 292.

and Kwajalein in the district center had a voluntary enrollment of over 400, while on the outer islands statistics indicated another 612 in attendance.[9]

The naval administration faced two basic problems that would continue to plague the education program in the islands: the absence of a common language and the lack of trained native teachers. The first was attacked through establishment of a 12-course curriculum in basic English at an interpreters' school on Kwajalein. The second stumbling block was resolved in 1945 when a normal school for the training of teachers was established in the Marshalls.

Visits by field officers, even at this early date, indicated a concern, far better suited to the American scene than to the island world, for discipline, orderliness, and attendance at school. Military officers, whose American educational backgrounds had not trained them for cultural shock, were unprepared for the informal, casual, and undisciplined conduct of the Marshallese teachers employed in the schools.[10] Officers urged in their reports that the local teachers be made more accountable to the military government.

In the Mariana Islands, the education program was inaugurated in the summer of 1944. The thinking of the director of education was that a combined education-recreation program would keep the youngsters out of trouble and, "because it was in keeping with American ideas of free education, a school program was ordered."[11] By the end of the wartime era, voluntary attendance of Chamorro-Carolinian pupils in the Marianas was over 600.[12] Because of the language problem, English classes were especially designed for Chamorro needs.

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[9] Richards, op. cit., pp. 56-57.

[10] Ibid., p. 398.

[11] J. L. Taylor, "The Little Red Schoolhouse Comes to Saipan," Education (September 1948), p. 56.

[12] Richards, op. cit., p. 492.

English textbooks from the Red Cross, Armed Forces Institute, and Hawaii Department of Education were obtained for the schools, and the local education department prepared Chamorro-English vocabulary lists as well as a geography and history of the Marianas.[13]

Wartime education programs were never as extensive in the Western Caroline Islands as in other areas of the Mandated Islands because of the belief at the termination of the war that, until the future status of the islands was clarified, it was "not desired to embark upon a program of advanced education for the island population."[14] However, schools were in operation on Angaur in the Palau group with compulsory attendance required for all children between the ages of 8 and 16. Enrollment was 101 students. While younger children were taught games, older students attended classes in English, penmanship, arithmetic, and drawing five days a week. Evening classes in English were offered for Palauan adults.[15]

Aware of the vague directives from the Commander in Chief of the Pacific Ocean Areas, a staff meeting of military officers responsible for education matters was held in November 1945. Emanating from this conference were the following guidelines regarding the adoption of a civilian education program for Micronesia.

The establishment of grades and arrangement of courses were to be on an eight-year basis, the school week being six days and the school year nine months. Though attendance was voluntary, those admitted would be between the ages of 6 and 16. Extra-curricular activities were to be along American lines,

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[13] Ibid., p. 493.

[14] Ibid., pp. 634-635.

[15] J. L. Taylor, "The American Educational Program for the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands," School and Society, Vol. 69 (January 22, 1949), ...

such as boy and girl scout organizations. The English language was to be the sole medium of instruction. The curriculum was to be uniform, drawn up by education officers of the various island areas with the approval of the military government.[16]

Here we see the naval government issuing orders intended to incorporate within the Micronesian educational framework, American cultural values, such as a clock and calendar-oriented program, rather than one governed by the seasons or agricultural cycles. The natural and sensible assumption, undoubtedly relevant to the American scene, was certainly questionable in a Pacific Island culture.

Two area-wide educational conferences held in late 1946 and early 1947 throw more light on the emergence of a clear-cut program of Americanization in the former Japanese Mandate. All military government units in the islands were represented by their education officers, island school administrators, or both. The first meeting provided an opportunity for educators to discuss common problems, while the second and more important, resulted in specific recommendations ranging from standardization of programs to the establishment of normal schools for the training of teachers.

The shortage of qualified Micronesian personnel undoubtedly contributed to plans for the establishment of model teacher training schools in each of the districts, as well as an advanced model school, the Marianas Teacher Training School (MATTS), to be located on Guam. The "normal schools" were to prepare teachers to meet the developing needs of the embryonic secondary program. These schools were to teach intermediate subjects as well as to provide

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[16] U. S. Pacific Fleet Forward Area, Central Pacific, "Letter to Island Commanders, Saipan and Tinian," February 25, 1945, as cited in Taylor, "Little Red Schoolhouse Comes to Saipan," op. cit., pp. 56-57.

pre-professional training in medicine, nursing, agriculture, business, and vocational trades.

Another directive concluded that although the educational policy of the military was to provide the people with tools of self-reliance, the primary objective would be to cultivate their respect and loyalty "to the U. S. by teaching the history, customs, and ideals of the U. S. and its people."[17] Permeating such a sweeping statement was the basic philosophy of education that guided the naval authorities in planning a program in the islands: The decision as to what was best for Micronesia was based on the American ideal of democracy and equality.

Trusteeship Period: 1947-1951

The final phase of the naval administration coincided with the designation of Micronesia as the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands under which the United States in the field of education obligated itself to:

> Promote the educational advancement of the inhabitants, and to this end take steps toward the establishment of a general system of elementary education, facilitate the cultural advancement of the population, and encourage qualified students to pursue higher education, including training on the professional level.[18]

Recognizing its professional limitations in the field of education, the Navy in 1947 sought the advice of experienced educators. The Advisory Committee on Education for Guam and the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands, composed of 18 civilian educators and specialists, was established for this purpose.[19]

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[17] Richards, op.cit., p. 374.

[18] U. S. Department of State, Draft Trusteeship Agreement for the Japanese Mandated Islands, Publication 2784 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1947), p. 6.

[19] J. L. Taylor. "Schools of the Trust Territory," Hawaiian Educational Review (February 1951), p. 159.

Among its earliest recommendations was the following program and structure. Entrance into school at 8 years of age, six years of elementary education, and three years of intermediate terminal education for potential community leaders or of preparatory education for those who would attend advanced schools. English was to be adopted as the medium of instruction because of the limited vocabulary and virtual absence of printed materials in the vernacular languages, as well as to provide a lingua franca for a scattered population. (The language question, beyond the scope of this paper, was one of the most vital questions debated between the naval administration, educators, and anthropologists.)

The Advisory Committee continued in existence until 1950 when the Navy felt it had "veered from the educational path to anthropological and sociological byways"[20] and that its services were no longer needed.

At the termination of the naval period, the authorities proclaimed that "elementary schools were established on all islands where 11 or more children of school age were living."[21] The elementary grades, one through six, were attended by pupils 8 to 14 for a 180-day school year. The study of English and the vernacular languages, arithmetic, social studies, art, handicrafts, and gardening formed the basic six-year curriculum, emphasis being placed on the studying of the vernacular the first several years, with English reading and writing commencing in the third year.[22]

Education beyond the elementary level was not available in each district until 1948 when the Advisory Committee on Education recommended the establishment

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[20] Ibid.

[21] Richards, op.cit., p. 993.

[22] Taylor, "A Pacific Island Adaptation," op.cit., pp. 292-294.

of three-year intermediate schools in each of the district centers and Yap[23] to replace the local teacher-education institutions.[24]

In addition to teacher preparation, the curriculum provided broadened opportunities for terminal education for elementary school graduates, as well as pre-professional training for those seeking higher education. Emphasis was placed on English, social studies, commercial subjects, industrial arts, and vocational training as being the most appropriate for the ultimate advancement of the people.[25]

Unlike the elementary schools, those at the intermediate level were under much closer American supervision, the funding coming entirely from government sources. By the termination of the naval period, the instructional staff was supervised and instructed by a majority of Americans.[26]

At the apex of the educational system in the territory was an institution developed to meet the growing demands for educational personnel at all levels. The Pacific Islands Teacher Training School (PITTS) was the successor of the Marianas Area Teacher Training School formerly established on Guam for the preparation of teachers from Micronesia. The name PITTS was really a misnomer as the institution actually embraced three schools offering teacher

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[23] Yap was incorporated within the Palau District in the Western Caroline Islands. The other districts of the territory were Truk and Ponape in the Eastern Carolines, the Marshall Islands, and the Mariana Islands.

[24] A more detailed description of the original function of the intermediate schools may be found in J. L. Taylor, "The American Educational Program for the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands," School and Society (January 22, 1949).

[25] Donald F. Smith, "Education of the Micronesian with Emphasis on the Historical Development," unpublished doctoral dissertation, The American University, 1968, p. 178.

[26] J. L. Taylor, director of education in the territory during this period, indicated that the 625 students in the six intermediate schools were supervised and instructed by 46 teachers, 24 of whom were Americans.

training, communications, and general education. Established in 1948, the schools's faculty consisted primarily of Americans, while the student body came from the various cultural districts with quotas assigned each district. The administration paid all costs in the form of scholarships covering room, board, and textbooks.[27]

Summary and Conclusions

By the end of the naval period of administration in 1951, the foundation of a public school system similar to that in American communities was readily discernible. Faced with the problem of creating an education program and hindered by the lack of professional guidance, naval officers recreated on Micronesian soil the only system they knew, the American public school system. A six-year elementary program followed by a three-year intermediate school and a central high school completed the ascent of the ladder system, evidence enough that the "little red schoolhouse" was to become a permanent fixture on the Micronesian scene.

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[27]Taylor, "A Pacific Island Adaptation," op.cit., p. 293.