

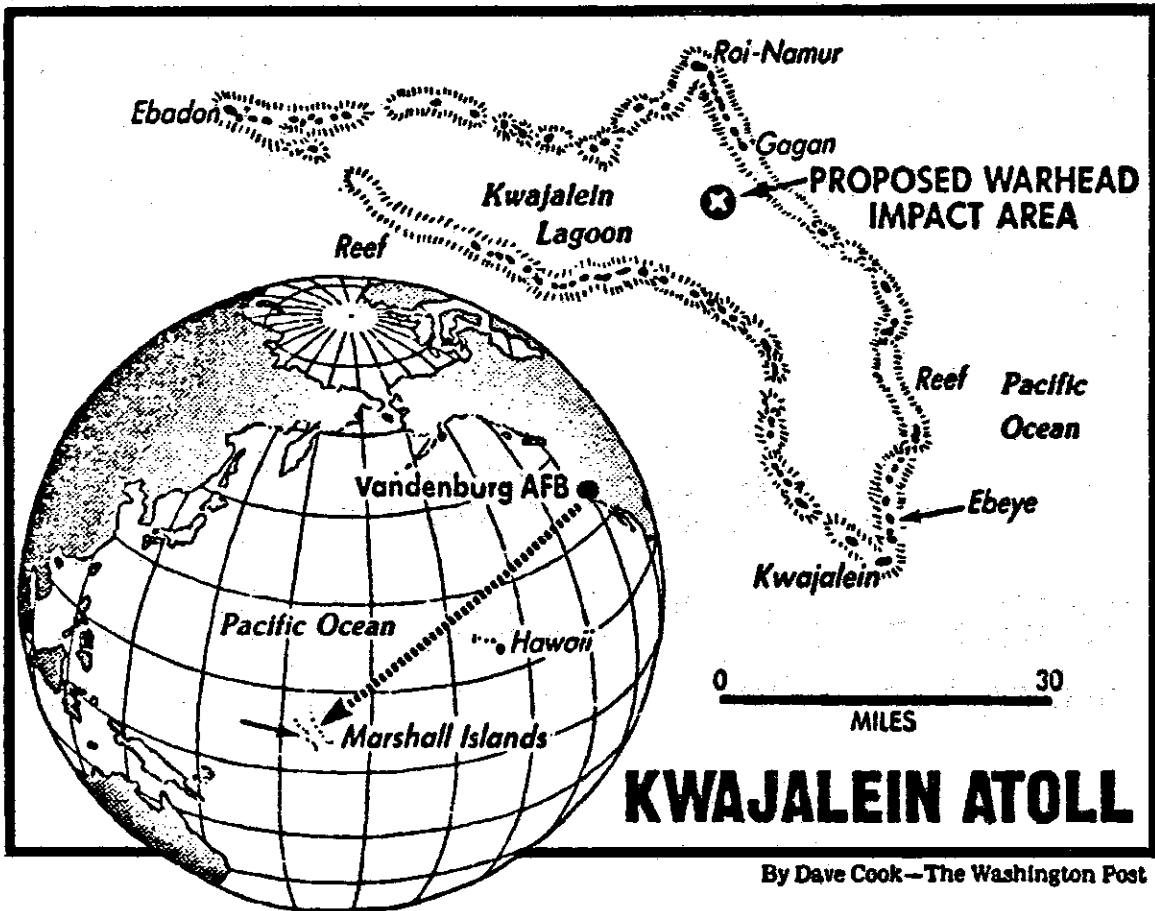
**Pacific Concerns  
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Reprint

# **Kwajalein: Home on the 'Range'**

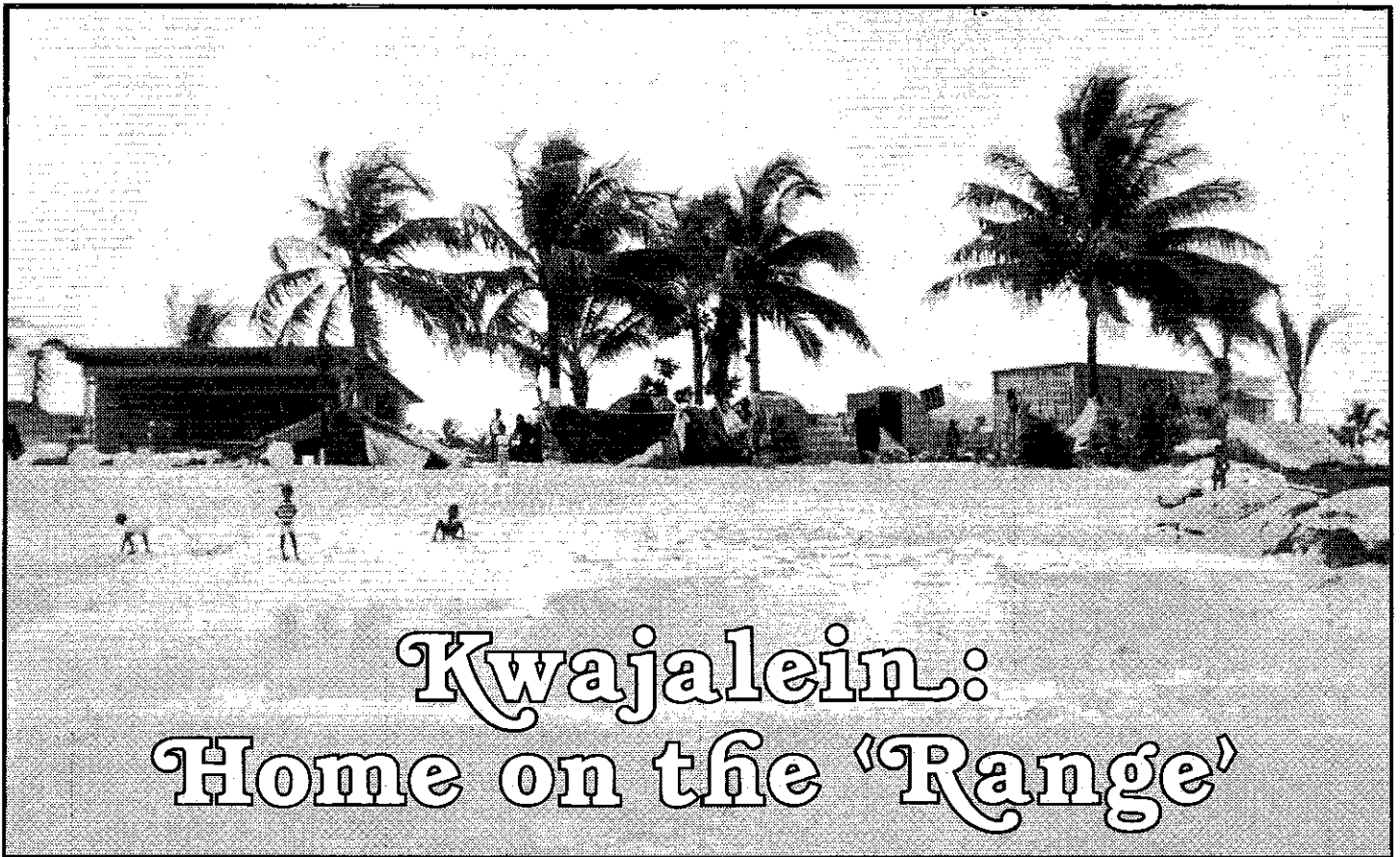
## **The Kwajalein Missile Range and Operation Homecoming**

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## Kwajalein: Home on the 'Range'

by Darlene Keju and Giff Johnson;  
photos by Julian Riklon

**K**wajalein Missile Range is no ordinary military base. Although 3,000 Americans live and work on Kwajalein, only some 30 are military personnel. Long used as the primary testing range for offensive missiles and anti-missile radar defense, KMR has perhaps contributed more to the nuclear arms race than any other spot on earth.

The new MX missile, a key weapon in the U.S. nuclear arsenal, is scheduled to have its delivery system tested by KMR. Kwajalein has also become a key link in the United States' space warfare strategy, as its facilities recently went "on line" for anti-satellite detection. The \$1 billion missile range, in the Marshall Islands, is in the only remaining United Nations Trust Territory.

Ebeye, three miles from Kwajalein Island, is no ordinary Pacific island. More than 8,000 Marshallese live crowded on this tiny, 78-acre island in dilapidated housing amid appalling sanitary conditions. The Marshallese on Ebeye are totally dependent on wages earned at the Kwajalein base because the military has severely restricted their access to the huge 900-square mile lagoon for fishing and to their 93 islands for agriculture.

Kwajalein landowners in June began a four-month resettlement of 11 "off-limits" islands protesting Ebeye conditions and the recently signed Compact of Free Association (July/Aug 82, pp. 10-11). The protest sail-in, dubbed "Operation Homecoming" by Marshallese, threatened to disrupt missile tests and jeopardized the landowners' major source of income.

Temporary shelters along the beach at Camp Hamilton, Kwajalein Island, during the recent protest.

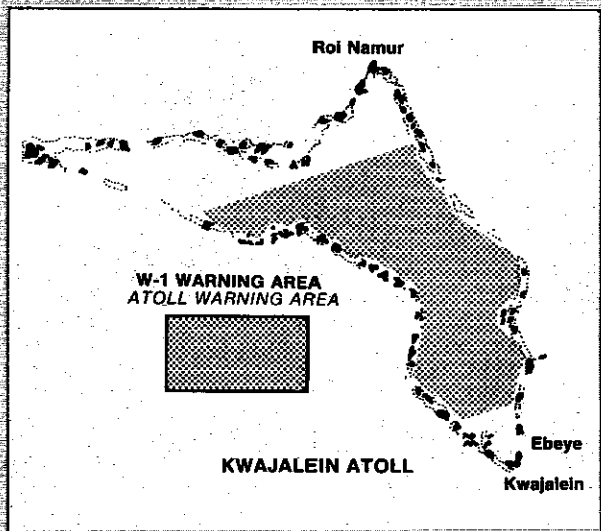
The festering problems leading to that drastic action by Kwajalein landowners began more than 30 years ago and are still not well known outside the Marshall Islands.

After taking Kwajalein from the Japanese in bloody fighting at the end of World War II, the U.S. brought in several hundred Marshallese to clean up the war debris and construct base facilities on Kwajalein Island. During the Bikini and Enewetak nuclear tests of the 1940s and 1950s, Kwajalein served as a vital support base. By 1951, 550 Marshallese were living in squalid shacks in the labor camp which contrasted starkly with the orderly American housing nearby. To remove the eyesore, the Navy relocated the 550 Marshallese to Ebeye Island, into housing built for 370 people.

The base was considered expendable when the nuclear testing finished in 1958, but a year later, the Navy chose Kwajalein, the world's largest atoll, as the target for testing intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBM's) fired from California.

The U.S. removed the people living on Roi Namur, in northern Kwajalein Atoll, to Ebeye in 1960. Roi Namur, like many other islands in the atoll, was to develop into a key monitoring station, with radar and other missile tracking equipment. No compensation was provided to the owners of Roi Namur. A year later, after the Navy designated the ocean area between the southern tip of Kwajalein and nearby Lib Island as an "impact zone" for incoming rockets, the Lib islanders were also removed to Ebeye.

The first lease providing compensation for Kwajalein



MICRONESIA SUPPORT COMMITTEE, WASH. D.C.

## Islanders Return to Ebeye as Agreement Ends Protest

by Greg Knudsen

Operation Homecoming ended in October as the Kwajalein landowners returned "home" to Ebeye.

A new agreement was signed October 20 which authorized continued U.S. use of the Kwajalein Missile Range. The previous agreement had expired September 30.

The agreement—signed by the U.S. Department of Defense, the Marshall Islands government, and the Kwajalein Atoll Corporation (representing the landowners)—is valid at least through Sept. 30, 1985.

Portions of the Compact of Free Association between the U.S. and the Marshalls, signed last May 30, were renegotiated. Major changes include: reducing the maximum term of the lease from 50 to 30 years; provision for a greater share of the \$9 million annual "rent" to the landowners; establishment of a \$10 million fund to improve living conditions over the next three years; and return to unrestricted use of six other islands in the atoll.

Ataji L. Balos, KAC chairman, said following the agreement, "We think we can live with it, at least until 1985." The agreement as signed is only for a three-year interim term and does not automatically extend through 30 years unless the Compact of Free Association is enacted in the Marshalls.

Balos looks upon the Kwajalein agreement as only a short-term arrangement. He does not expect the Compact to be approved in the Marshalls, citing opposition in the radiation-affected atolls as well as from KAC. "We still have problems with the Compact," he said, "and if the people understand what's in the Compact, they will not vote for it."

George Allen, legal counsel for the landowners, stated: "The combination of the return of islands, clear provisions of improvement of living conditions through a capital improvement program, shorter use to 30 years and possibly only three years, plus formal recognition of the Kwajalein Atoll Corporation means that the landowners emerged having prevailed in the negotiations."

Island landowners was signed by them and the U.S. in 1964. Already displaced from their island and lacking legal counsel, the Kwajalein people agreed to a lump sum payment of \$750,000 for 99 years' use of Kwajalein Island—less than \$9 an acre per year.

In 1964 the Army took over from the Navy and decided Kwajalein's lagoon, protected by its surrounding ring of islands, was a better target for gathering flight test information on missiles. They chose the central 2/3 of the lagoon as the new impact area. Several hundred people were living on or using the lagoon for copra, food gathering, and farming. To deal with those people, an Army report said the "most practical and economic solution to the range safety problem" was to resettle the residents from these Mid Atoll Corridor islands onto Ebeye. So in 1965, more people were evicted from their home islands; 194 people were given housing on Ebeye and \$25 a month for the "inconvenience," although more than 1,000 people had customary land rights in these islands.

By this time the nuclear arms race was in full swing. The emphasis had changed from building bigger and more destructive nuclear bombs to designing ever more accurate missiles for delivering nuclear warheads to within a few feet of a target thousands of miles away. And Kwajalein, 4,200 miles west of the missile launching pad at California's Vandenburg Air Force Base, provided a unique, long range target area in an enclosed lagoon hidden from Soviet "trawlers."

Missile testing activity increased and more Micronesian employees were needed. As in the 1940s, the U.S. military once again recruited several hundred Marshallese from outside Kwajalein, as well as other Micronesians, to work at Kwajalein, further ballooning Ebeye's population. By the mid-1960s, Ebeye's population had grown from just 500 in 1951 to 4,500 with about 650 wage earners employed at Kwajalein.

Although virtually every increase in Ebeye's population can be traced to U.S. recruitment of workers from outside or forced relocations of island landowners, the Army refused to face up to the critical conditions of over-crowding on Ebeye. As late as 1967, with the Ebeye population already at 4,500, the Army was planning housing to accommodate 3,500 people on the island.

By 1968, the U.S. compensation for the acknowledged 194 displaced Mid-Corridor people was raised by the paltry amount of \$15, to \$40 a month. Not surprisingly, the people then petitioned the Congress of Micronesia "to right a grave injustice." They pointed out, "electric bills and house rentals exceed \$40 each month, and already some of us have been threatened with eviction. . ." Additionally, they said that anybody born since the relocation was not considered eligible for compensation. The people had been accustomed to using their home islands for farming, but there was no room on Ebeye for food gardening.

Hoping to force the Army and the Trust Territory to act on their problems, the people issued an ultimatum: if they weren't granted access to their Mid-Corridor islands, then they would move to begin resettling them.

Believing the people were bluffing, the Trust Territory and the Army ignored the ultimatum from the Mid-Corridor people, setting off the first protest sail-in in 1969. The occupation of their off limits islands ended after a week when Trust Territory officials agreed to negotiate their demands. A year later, the Defense Department and the Mid-Corridor landowners reached

**Ataji Balos, leader of the landowners, near a restricted area on Kwajalein (top); Daytime activity at Camp Hamilton (middle); Shelters near radar facility.**

a 5-year agreement providing \$420,000 per year, approximately \$285 annual per capita compensation based on 1,470 landowners.

This money, however, did not solve critical Ebeye problems, exacerbated by Marshallese exclusion from Kwajalein facilities. It was totally inadequate for the school costs alone for the children of Ebeye families. In 1978, more than 50% of the Ebeye population was under 14 years of age, but there is no high school on the island. And the Kwajalein high school, just three miles away, is segregated for American children only. For further education, Marshallese parents must send their children hundreds or thousands of miles away to schools in Majuro, Guam, other parts of Micronesia, or the U.S., all at great personal expense for air fares and boarding school costs.

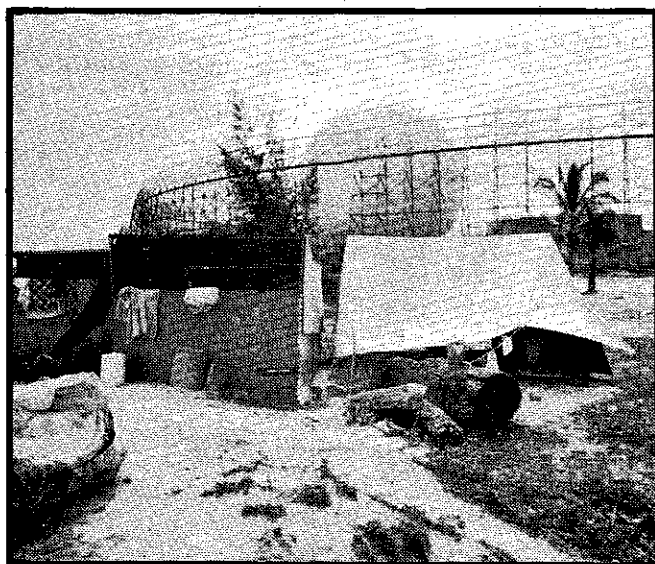
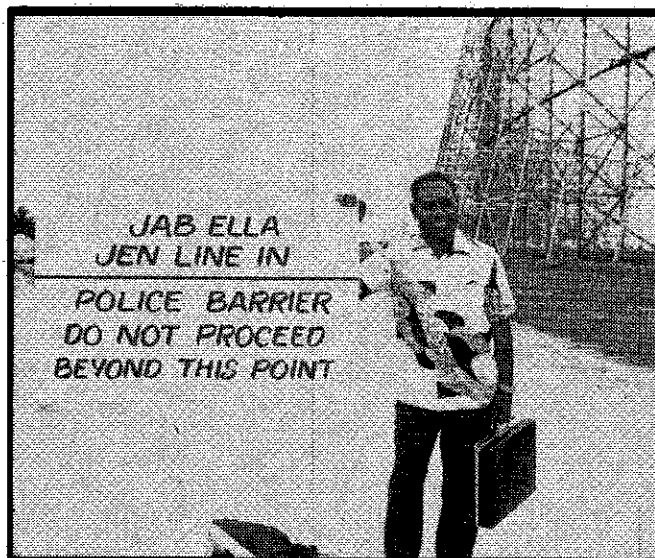
Additionally, Marshallese do not have the same privileges as civilian American employees on military bases in Guam, Hawaii, or Kwajalein. While American KMR employees—the vast majority of whom are civilians—may shop at the stores with subsidized low priced goods on Kwajalein, Marshallese KMR employees may not. They, and other Marshallese, must buy food from Ebeye stores at prices even greater than Hawaii, which has the highest cost of living in the U.S. A 1976 study reported that food prices on Ebeye were, on average, 100% more than at the inexpensive stores on Kwajalein.

Moreover, the Marshallese have few recreational facilities—a volleyball and basketball court and one baseball field for 8,000 people—and only very limited access to Kwajalein's abundant facilities. In contrast, the 3,000 Americans on 900-acre Kwajalein are provided with bowling alleys, a golf course, basketball and handball courts, baseball fields, swimming pools, free movies, and other amenities.

The Marshallese—who have jobs of low prestige by American standards, such as maids, gardeners, cooks, warehouse workers and taxi drivers—keep the military base clean, trim, and functioning. But Marshallese are victims of systematic wage and job discrimination. "Close to 90% of the workers said that they feel they are being discriminated against in terms of jobs and pay because they are Micronesians," Dr. William Alexander told a U.S. Congressional team after extensive research on Ebeye in 1976.

There are numerous reports of American contract workers receiving substantially higher salaries than the Marshallese who trained them. Marshallese supervisors are noticeably lacking, though some Marshallese have worked on Kwajalein for more than 20 years. In 1976, then Acting Trust Territory High Commissioner Peter Coleman said: "While some of the Micronesian workers at Ebeye may have the technical ability to warrant promotion, they do not have the ability to be in charge, to supervise people, particularly Americans."

But this status of second class citizens in their own islands is not limited to the workplace. The Marshallese must have passes, issued in limited numbers, to travel to their own islands for such purposes as banking or airline business. All KMR employees must wear ID badges with their photographs. Marshallese must be off of Kwajalein each night or they risk being arrested. The KMR



## A Biological Time Bomb

by Darlene Keju and Giff Johnson

Miserable health and sanitation conditions on Ebeye have regularly brought on epidemics that are virtually impossible to control. In 1963, a severe polio epidemic swept Ebeye, spreading to other parts of the Marshalls. More than 190 people were left severely paralyzed at a time when polio vaccine had already been available to Americans for eight years.

But the lack of health and sanitation facilities is not the only reason why Ebeye has been labeled a "biological time bomb." Dr. William Vitarelli, the U.S. High Commissioner's representative on Ebeye from 1967-1969, reported: "We were having a gastroenteritis epidemic on Ebeye. . . . I had pleaded with the army colonel from the Kwajalein Missile Range across the lagoon, who was in charge of building the water catchment systems, to cover the catchment tanks. I feared that they would become contaminated with the filth of Ebeye. He refused. We offered to build new covers ourselves if the Army would only provide the materials. Again he refused. Then the epidemic came which was traced to the uncovered and contaminated water tanks."

During the epidemic, he continued, "the Ebeye hospital ran out of intravenous fluids needed to sustain the lives of the Marshallese children severely dehydrated from profuse vomiting and diarrhea. I took one Marshallese child who was very ill and put her on a skiff and motored four miles to Kwajalein. . . . I wanted to take her to Kwajalein hospital for treatment. . . .

"We were stopped at the beach by an American guard who would not let the child enter the island. . . . The Marshallese nurse pleaded with the guard that the child was dying and she could not receive appropriate therapy on Ebeye. The guard did not permit the child onto the island. She died on her way back to Ebeye. There were many witnesses to this incident. . . . Five children died during that epidemic."

Eight years later, conditions on Ebeye were just as desperate. In 1976, Dr. Konrad Kotrady, a Brookhaven National Laboratory resident physician on Kwajalein, told a U.S. Congressional Committee investigating the problems on Ebeye: "The picture I would like to paint for Kwajalein regarding Ebeye's health care system is that Kwajalein has an attitude of indifference and apathy to what occurs on Ebeye. . . . The Army's position was summed up to me one day when a high level command officer at Kwajalein remarked that the sole purpose of the Army at Kwajalein is to test missile systems. They have no concern for the Marshallese and (it) is not of any importance to their being at Kwajalein."

"I contend that medicine is a human profession and should not be bound by racial, political, military, or any other interests. The sole interest should be the supreme care of a human being. . . . The present agreement between the Trust Territory and Kwajalein states that the KMR hospital is only to be used on an emergency basis. . . . And still in 1982 there is no sign of improvement, according to Marshallese interviewed.

command arbitrarily orders searches of Marshallese, and Army security police confiscate any goods purchased from Kwajalein (Americans often buy food and other merchandise for the Marshallese). Marshallese have suffered the indignity of searches on many occasions, and in 1981, a U.S. judge ruled that the Army has the power to carry out a search and seizure policy because the "base commander has inherent authority to protect its security and integrity."

Since the mid-1970s, there have been more than 8,000 people on Ebeye—approximately 5,000 Kwajalein Atoll landowners and 3,000 from other parts of the Marshalls or Micronesia. A now defunct Coast Guard station uses 12 acres of Ebeye's scarce land, so the people are jammed into 66 acres. Contrary to U.S. government statements, the majority of Ebeye residents are Kwajalein landowners who have no choice but to live on Ebeye, and many of the others were actively recruited by the U.S. to work at the base.

In the 1964 Kwajalein Island lease, the U.S. promised to "improve the economic and social conditions of the Marshallese people, particularly at Ebeye." Kwajalein leader Ataji Balos asserts "That lease was signed on the basis of those promises. Those promises have not been kept."

Because Ebeye is part of the U.N. Trust Territory, the Army says it is the T.T. government's responsibility. But the Trust Territory attitude is that because Ebeye is in the Army's backyard, the Army should deal with Ebeye problems. So the Marshallese are caught between an intransigent Trust Territory bureaucracy and a hostile Army command.

Examples abound. In late 1978, the Ebeye public works director wrote the high commissioner on Saipan that Ebeye's antiquated sewer system was on the verge of breaking down. He received no response to his letter, and six months later, in May 1979, the sewer system did indeed collapse. When people flushed their toilets, human waste gushed into their sinks. Additionally, raw sewage is flushed directly into the Ebeye lagoon, where the pollution levels have been tested to be 25,000 times higher than the safe level set by the World Health Organization. On an island where epidemics are almost impossible to control once they start, sanitation problems of this magnitude risk many lives.

These conditions exist under a U.N. Trusteeship Agreement which binds the U.S. to "protect the health of the inhabitants." The Marshallese have always had great faith in the trustee, but recognize that their only means of forcing action is to take action themselves.

In July 1979, more than 500 landowners began a large protest sail-in to their islands. After two weeks, during which time several missile tests were reportedly postponed, the Defense Department agreed to negotiate new agreements for use of Kwajalein. Later that year, the U.S. agreed to increase its compensation to \$9 million a year for use of Kwajalein Atoll, \$5 million of which is a direct payment to the 5,000 landowners. The other \$4 million goes to the Marshall Islands government for capital improvements and other projects.

This was the first compensation the Roi Namur people had received, despite being evicted from their island 20 years earlier. Kwajalein Atoll landowners have demanded the U.S. provide past use compensation. But U.S. officials refused, saying past use is a "dead issue."

Ebeye is a good example of the axiom "the more things change, the more they stay the same." In May

**Passing time during the four-month long protest occupation (top); Home again—temporarily (middle); Weaving palm fronds for shelters at Camp Hamilton.**

1982, the U.S. and Marshall Islands negotiators signed the Compact of Free Association, granting the U.S. 50 years' use of the Kwajalein Missile Range. At last, according to the agreement, the Marshallese will receive equal pay for equal work. But nothing in the language of the Compact states that Marshallese are to be treated as first class citizens in their own islands or that they will no longer suffer the indignities of the past 38 years since the U.S. took over their homes. Moreover, the Compact reduces the annual level of direct compensation to \$1.9 million in spite of the landowners' years of struggle to get it to the 1979 level.

Last year, the Kwajalein Atoll Corporation, representing the landowners, officially communicated to the Marshall Islands government nine points for inclusion into a future base agreement (Sep/Oct 81, p. 13). These included limiting the pact to 15 years, provisions for past use claims, "development of a master plan for a decent Marshallese community on the Atoll" and agreement by the military to discontinue its search and seizure policy against Marshallese. These points, however, were ignored by U.S. and Marshall Islands negotiators, and the landowners were excluded from the status talks. Further, money promised in 1979 to repair the collapsed sewer system, as well as the ailing power plant, had been approved but not spent by July 1982.

Thus, in June of this year, the Kwajalein Atoll Corporation once again began a massive sail-in to their many islands, protesting the terms of the Compact.

Calling it "Operation Homecoming," the resettlement quickly grew to more than 1,000 people. Two camps were set up on Kwajalein Island, as well as on Roi Namur and nine Mid-Corridor islands. Interviews with many involved in Operation Homecoming reflected how much they enjoyed living on clean islands; catching and eating fresh fish, crabs, and turtles; and the community spirit of everyone working together.

The U.S. Defense Department had accused the Kwajalein landowners of illegally occupying their own islands, although in five separate instances, courts in the U.S. and Micronesia refused to declare the resettlement of Kwajalein illegal.

What's more, at the outset of Operation Homecoming, the Army command instituted stiff measures to quell the protests. For the duration of the protest, said the Army, none of the Marshallese maids or gardeners would be allowed to work. Thus the Army cut off more than 200 Marshallese wage earners, or about 25% of the total Marshallese workforce on Kwajalein, for nearly four months.

From the beginning of the protest Marshallese had their purses and bags searched every day as they returned home to Ebeye. Food, cigarettes, and other items were routinely confiscated by Army security police.

For more than a month, the Army decreed that Marshallese could not bring bag lunches to work, fearing that food from Ebeye would be given to the protesters, and at the same closed the snack bar to all Marshallese. So Marshallese on Kwajalein had to eat lunch at the more expensive Mess Hall, the only facility open. The snack bar was finally reopened in late July to Marshallese KMR workers only.



At the outset of Operation Homecoming, the Marshallese suffered from other Army harassment such as the closure of the bank and shutting off of toilets at the Kwajalein and Roi Namur campsites where the largest number of landowners were.

But Marshallese businessmen were hit the hardest when the Army stopped Marshallese—except missile range workers with ID badges—from using the Kwajalein bank for the month of July. There is no bank on Ebeye and businesses lost thousands of dollars on loans they were unable to pay, and on food shipments they were unable to pay for or pick up. At least three stores were forced to close temporarily, reported the Ebeye Chamber of Commerce president.

Finally in August the bank was reopened on a limited basis, with 80 passes issued to Marshallese for banking use two days a week. They traveled by boat to Kwajalein where they were herded into a waiting school bus and driven to the bank, all the while guarded by armed security police. At the bank, 10 people at a time were allowed off the bus to conduct business, while the other Marshallese remained incarcerated in the bus. When one group of 10 finished their banking they returned to the bus and another 10 were allowed off. When all had completed their banking, they were returned to the pier and shipped back to Ebeye.

In mid-August, Noel Koch, deputy assistant secretary of defense, said that the Defense Department would terminate all banking services for Marshallese on Kwajalein as of September 30, 1982. Additionally, Koch added that the search and seizure "measures instituted during the demonstration will be conducted to prevent the removal of unauthorized items from KMR by individuals."

Koch noted the Defense Department's concern for the

"potential dependency upon U.S. sources and the resultant negative effect upon independent development of Marshallese capabilities" as the reason for these harsh threats.

Although the Army appears intent on denying Marshallese their basic human rights, not all Americans agree with these policies. U.S. Representative John Seiberling said in August: "I think the actions of the military out there are hardly becoming of a nation that is a great power. Here we have a bunch of people who are our wards. . . . We're occupying their land and we're denying them the right to peacefully assemble and petition for redress of grievances that our constitution guarantees to our own citizens. And yet we're in their country. I think it's a pretty sad spectacle."

The mis-handling of the Kwajalein situation by the Defense Department was inevitable because the military sees Kwajalein as no more than another piece of real estate. Marshallese, however, place an entirely different value on their limited land, as demonstrated by a 1956 statement of 100 Marshallese leaders to the U.N.: "Land means a great deal to the Marshallese. It means more than just a place where you can plant your food crops and build your houses; or a place where you can bury your dead. It is the very life of the people. Take away their land and their spirits go also."

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*Darlene Keju was born in Ebeye, growing up there and on Wotje Atoll. Giff Johnson has visited Ebeye several times, staying there for an extended period in 1979. The authors were married in a mid-summer ceremony on Wotje Atoll. Julian Riklon is treasurer of the Kwajalein Atoll Corporation, and was an active participant in "Operation Homecoming."*