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**The Republic of Palau and the United States Celebrate the Completion
of the Palau Compact Road**

By Joseph Bonfiglio, Honolulu District Public Affairs

(FORT SHAFTER, HI - NR 033-07) -- Officials from the Republic of Palau, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the U. S. Department of the Interior participated in a ribbon cutting ceremony Oct. 1, to mark the formal completion and turnover of the Palau Compact Road.

The ceremony hosted by Palau President Tommy E. Remengesau, Jr. was part the republic's 13th Annual Independence Day celebration.

Attending the ceremony were: Deputy Assistant Secretary David Cohen and Program Manager Tom Bussanich from the Interior Department's Office of Insular Affairs; Mark Bezner, chargé d'affaires at the U.S. Embassy in Palau; Brig. Gen. John W. Peabody, commander, Corps of Engineers, Pacific Ocean Division; Lt. Col. Charles H. Klinge, commander Corps of Engineers, Honolulu District and Rear Adm. William D. French, commander, U.S. Naval Forces Marianas and U.S. Pacific Command defense representative to Palau.

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PALAU COMPACT ROAD 2/2/2/2

According to Brig. Gen. Peabody, “the completion of the Compact Road is a great day for Palau and the United States. It celebrates a partnership between the people of Palau and the United States represented by the Department of the Interior and the Corps of Engineers.”

“Today marks the success of all those who have worked together to overcome challenges in order to build a better future for the people of Palau. The Palau Compact Road is a marvel and a testament to the vision of those who dreamed about the road, the designers who spent years putting the plans together, the construction team that built it and to the people of Palau,” Brig. Gen. Peabody said.

The United States involvement with Palau (the westernmost of Micronesia’s Caroline Islands) dates back to World War II when American forces liberated the islands.

After the war, the United Nations created the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands (which included Palau) and the United States became the administering authority.

Palau and the U.S. signed a Compact of Free Association in 1994.

Palau became a sovereign state under the Compact and the U.S. continued to be responsible for its defense.

As part of the Compact, the United States promised to build a 53-mile-long paved road on Babeldaob, the largest of Palau’s more than 300 islands with 153 square miles of virtually undeveloped land. Palau’s total land area is 188 square miles.

About two-thirds of Palau’s approximately 20,000 people are located in the capital of Koror, which has only about 4 percent of the nation’s land.

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PALAU COMPACT ROAD 3/3/3

It is hoped that the road, built under the Corps' design and supervision will change the island nation's future and foster Palau's economic development.

Palauans who own land in Babeldaob, for example, will be able to commute from their homes rather than to live in rented apartments to work in Koror.

Likewise, Palauans living in villages on Babeldaob will have access to the hospital, college, and other facilities in Koror.

Greater accessibility to Babeldaob will provide the room and the opportunity for Palau and its people to grow.

The road was badly needed, according to Alex Morrison, the Honolulu District's resident engineer and administrative contracting officer for the project since its inception.

"Even though it is larger than all the other Palau islands combined, Babeldaob had almost no paved roads," he said. "It was impossible to drive from north to south if there had been any rain at all, and if you could drive, it was an eight to 10-hour trek. So most of the travel around the island was by boat."

The road meets U.S. Department of Transportation standards and includes access to the new capital site at Melekeok. The road is 24-feet-wide, with an asphalt-concrete surface and shoulders.

The Department of the Interior "hired" the Corps of Engineers to manage the road's design and construction.

DOI had overall responsibility, while the Corps' Honolulu Engineer District did the planning and design of the road and managed its construction and completion.

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PALAU COMPACT ROAD 4/4/4/4

Four Honolulu-based architectural-engineering firms collaborated on the design between 1994 and 1998 and the construction contract was awarded to prime contractor Daewoo Engineering and Construction of Seoul, Korea, March 30, 1999.

Building the road presented a number of challenges, Morrison said, starting with the island itself.

“Palau is not as mountainous as, say, Hawaii. But it is hilly, with very steep terrain features,” he said. “It’s very heavily vegetated, and because it’s tropical rainfall is common and often heavy. That means there are also a lot of streams and rivers. So it’s a challenging place from an engineering point of view.”

Another very real concern, Morrison said, was the substantial amount of World War II ordnance still on the island.

“There was a lot of fighting here during the war, and since this job started we’ve picked up more than 5,000 pieces of ordnance,” he said.

Once the jungle was cleared and any ordnance removed, the alignment was graded and the construction crews begin what Morrison called a “cut and fill” operation.

“That’s basically where you cut the hills down and fill the valleys up,” he said. “We’ve also had to deal with some 400 stream crossings, so there are a lot of drainage issues to deal with.”

Seven major bridges had to be built along the road’s route, Morrison said. Two cross ocean inlets, and the others cross streams or rivers.

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PALAU COMPACT ROAD 5/5/5/5

Given the extent of the construction and the pristine land and coastal environment, the Corps was very careful to enforce strict environmental standards.

“In terms of environmental planning and impacts, this road was built to the same standards we would use if we were building it in California or Kansas,” Morrison said.

“The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Marine Fisheries Service were all involved in the design phase, and their involvement continued during the construction phase.”

That same care and concern went into every aspect of the project, Morrison said.

“Everyone involved with this takes great pride in it, both because we want to build the best road possible and because we were working against some tremendous odds,” he said. “From an engineering and construction standpoint, this is as challenging as a road project could possibly be. The journey that used to take an entire day now takes two hours.”

“And that’s one of the reasons why I found this project so fascinating. This road will give the people of Palau a level of access to their own land that they’ve never before had,” he added. “This road will fundamentally change Palau’s future, and I appreciate the chance to be part of such an important effort.”