



Tanna Awaits

National Geographic May 1974

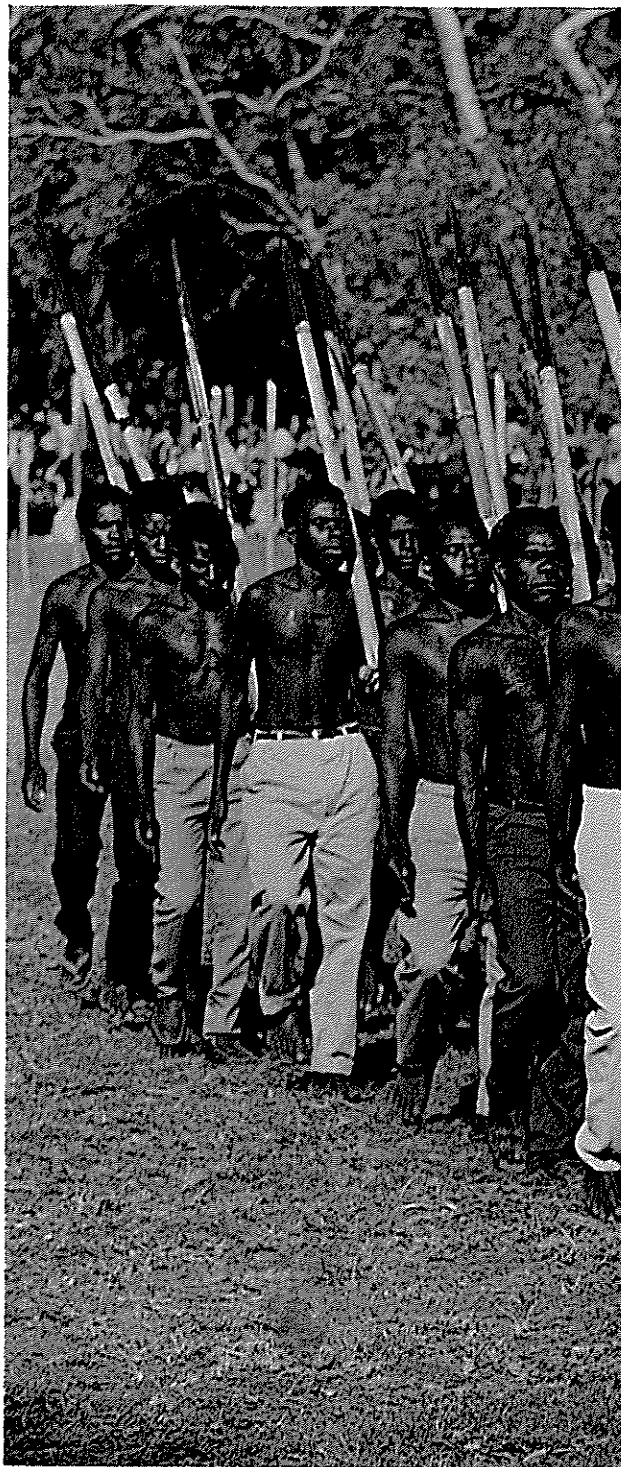
ON THE VOLCANO'S RIM looms a blood-red cross. Nearby, men with "U.S.A." daubed on their bodies shoulder make-believe rifles of bamboo. Soldiers of Christ? Hardly. On the New Hebridean island of Tanna, both cross and marchers herald a hoped-for messiah of material riches—a savior cryptically called John Frum.

Some followers of the mythical Frum consider him a beneficent spirit; others see him as a god come to earth, or as the "king of America." All believe he will someday usher in a prosperous, work-free millennium of unlimited "cargo"—pidgin English for Western material goods. Thus, anthropologists call the John Frum movement a "cargo cult," one of scores that have sprung up across Melanesia.

Stone Age ways ruled on Tanna when Capt. James Cook discovered the island in 1774. Traders' ships soon followed, disgorging trinkets and tools that seemed like manna from heaven. Surely, the Tannese reasoned, the god who gave the white foreigners sharp knives and bright cloth would not neglect them. Many adopted Christianity as a route to the strangers' wealth, but still the cargo failed to come.

Frustration grew, blossoming around 1940 into the John Frum cult. Prophets predicted Frum's arrival, and in 1942 World War II reached Tanna's shores. U. S. troops landed on nearby islands, bringing food, arms, prefabricated houses, jobs, and legions of jeeps. John Frum's long-awaited millennium was at hand!

But with the war's end, the cargo disappeared, and islanders resumed their vigil. Some turned to mock military drills in the hope of luring GIs—and cargo-laden Liberty ships—back to Tanna.





EMORY KRISTOF, NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC PHOTOGRAPHER

go to one of our inside 'sleep-ins' and have a mattress for three guilders a night."

"Are drugs a problem?" I asked.

"Our narcotics squad concentrates on hard-drug pushers," he replied. "That's one thing we *don't* tolerate. We don't bother much about 'pot,' although it's illegal too."

I had noticed a sign on a barge just across the canal from the police station: The Lowlands Weed Company, specializing in marijuana plants.

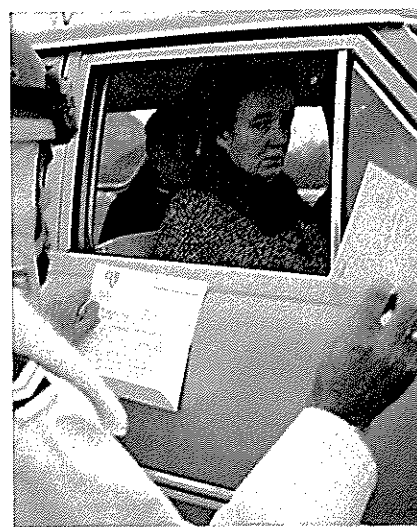
"It's legal to buy and sell the plants," Officer Jagerman explained. "It's only illegal to sell them dry. It became fashionable to plant your own hemp on your balcony. My own family did it. Now it's going out of style."

"The hippie fad is passing too," he said. "We had 3,000 in the Vondelpark last August. This summer we're down to 2,500. We still have about 50 parents coming to the police station every summer—Germans, Swiss, Italians, Americans—all looking for their 16-year-old son or daughter. We give them this map showing our sleep-ins and youth centers. They usually find their missing kids."

"This situation is under control," Mr. Jagerman concluded. "We Amsterdammers see things in perspective. If people aren't making trouble, let them alone. Live and let live. We have always been tolerant of minorities. We treat the hippies the same way."

The hippies killed with kindness! I talked to a group of them later in the Dam Square. They were seated cross-legged on an Oriental rug, drinking wine.

"Man, this *used* to be the place," one of them told me. "But it's getting too *structured* around here. We're thinking of going somewhere else, like maybe Copenhagen." □

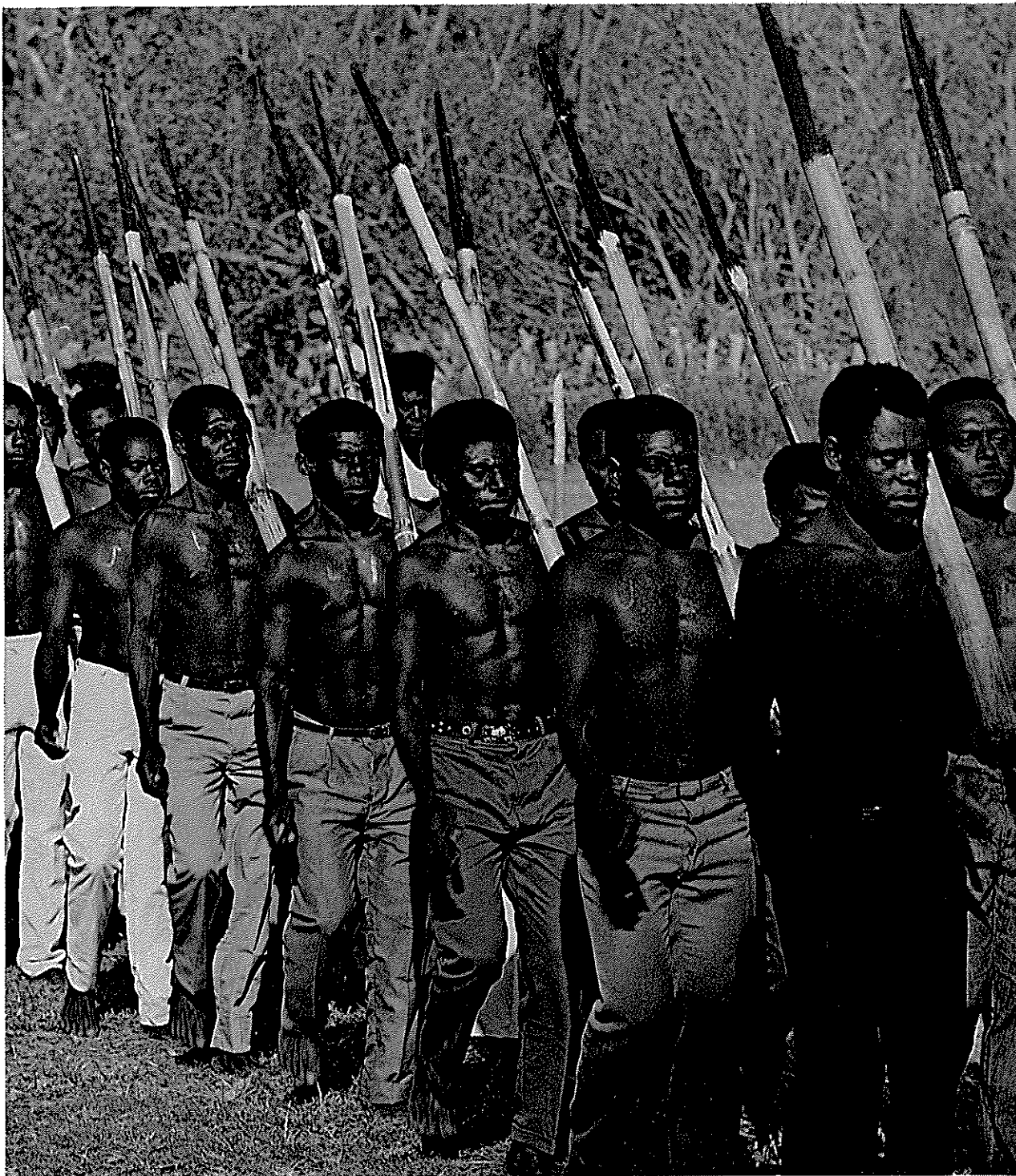


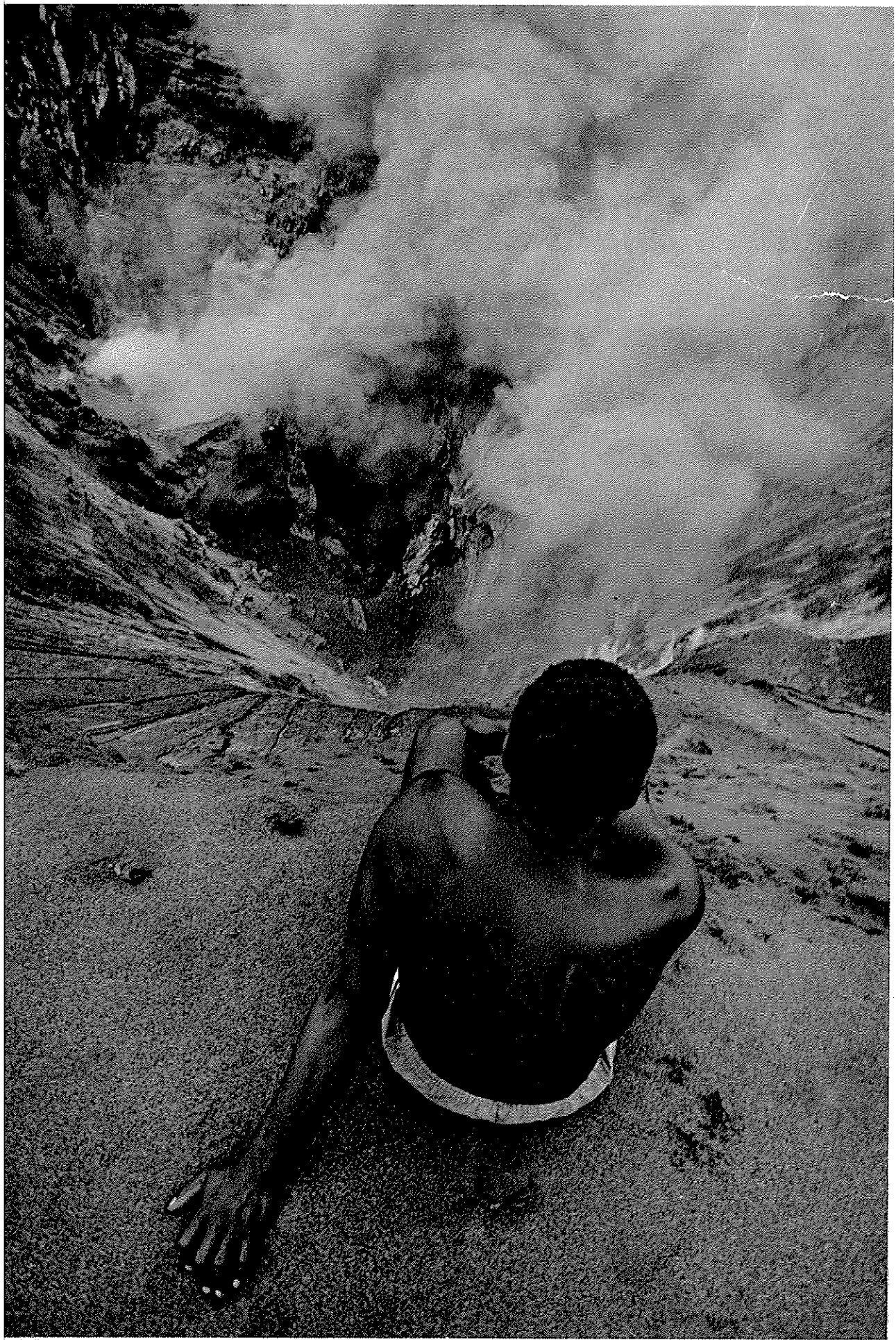
J. VAN BERKHOUT

Never on Sunday: The rule was imposed when gasoline sources dried up last fall. Special permits were carefully examined by police (above). "We've had harder times," say the Dutch, recalling battles against the dike-breaching sea and the Nazi occupation, when Amsterdam earned the motto bestowed by the late Queen Wilhelmina: "Heroic, Resolute, Merciful."

ARTICLE AND PHOTOGRAPHS BY KAL MULLER, Ph.D.

the Coming of John Frum





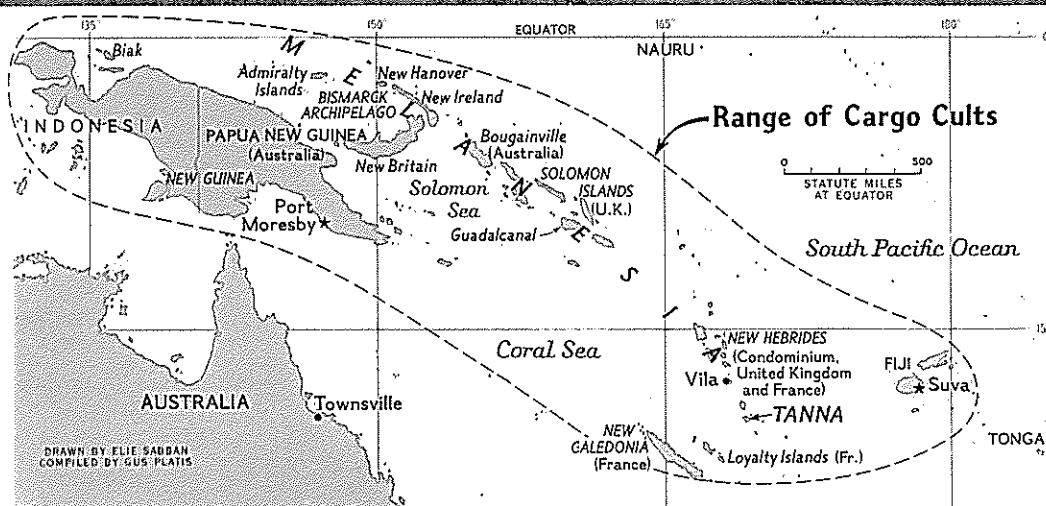
INITIALS of the GIs' homeland emblazon a drill-team member who gazes into the smoky throat of Yasur Volcano. His forefathers revered the crater as a god's fire-filled abode. Islanders now believe Yasur's red-hot depths harbor some 50,000 of John Frum's soldiers, ready to emerge when their leader arrives. To hasten that glorious day, pious followers lavish prayers and flowers upon red Frum crosses (**below**). Nearly all the island's 12,000 people believe at least to some degree in John Frum.

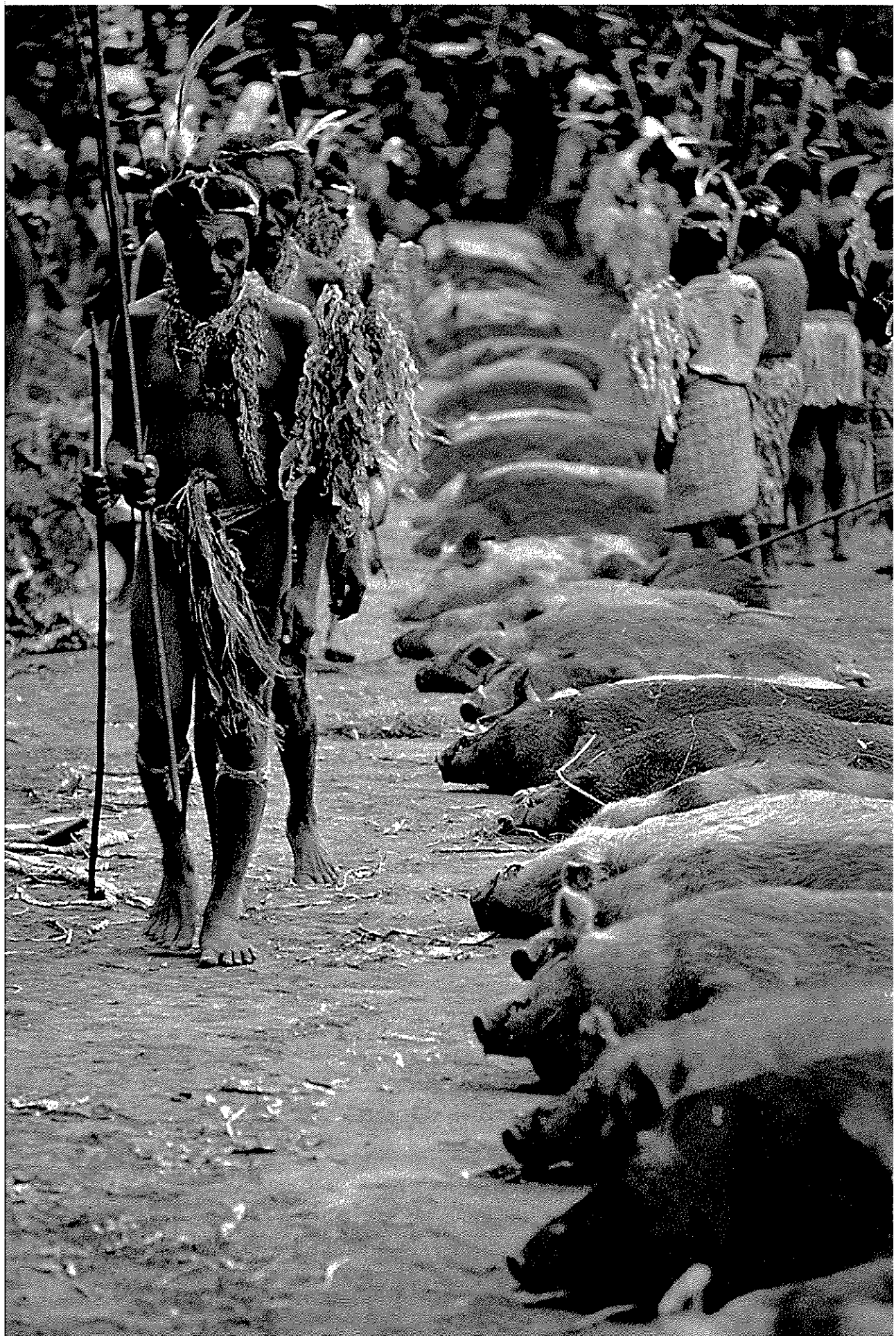
Awash in the Coral Sea's eastern fringe, Tanna is one of about 80 lush

isles of the New Hebrides (**map**). A British-French condominium rules the once-remote archipelago, now a scant three hours from Sydney, Australia—so close that tourist agencies promote Yasur as "the world's most accessible active volcano."

Tannese guides permit tourists to scale Yasur's cone, but allow no souvenir pebble-snatching, for they believe the stones hold powerful magic. Every "taboo-man," or shaman, keeps a private cache of rocks, each credited with a specific everyday purpose, such as healing, ensuring a good yam harvest, or causing favorable winds to blow.

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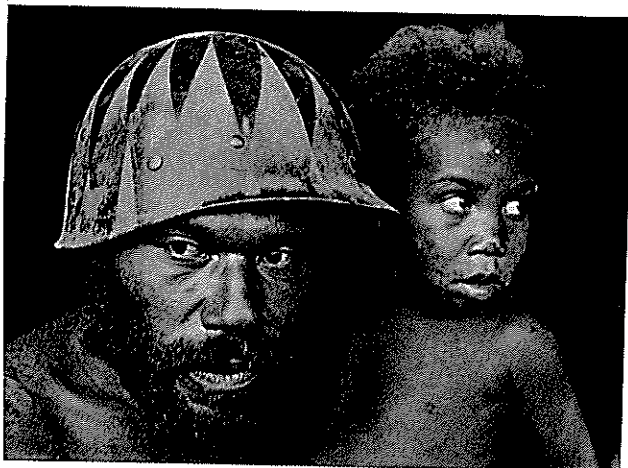




HUMAN WHIRLWIND swells and subsides during a dance at the nekowiar festival (above). Feet drumming out a thunderous rhythm, the men chant and slash the air with long, hooked "toka sticks." Later they will pair off to perform skits of everyday events—fishing, nailing wood, even using a jackhammer or playing tennis. Women and children proudly look on, and later take their turns.

In addition to dancing and giving up

Western dress, John Frum followers delight in returning to practices once banned by missionaries—magic and drinking narcotic kava, a root extract. But even these traditionalists tolerate the 20th century, and some own stock in the local airline, which they acquired in conventional capitalist fashion—with an outlay of cash. Two cultists wipe down one of "their" planes (left) as a third chats with the pilot, second from right, and Tanna's head of tourism.

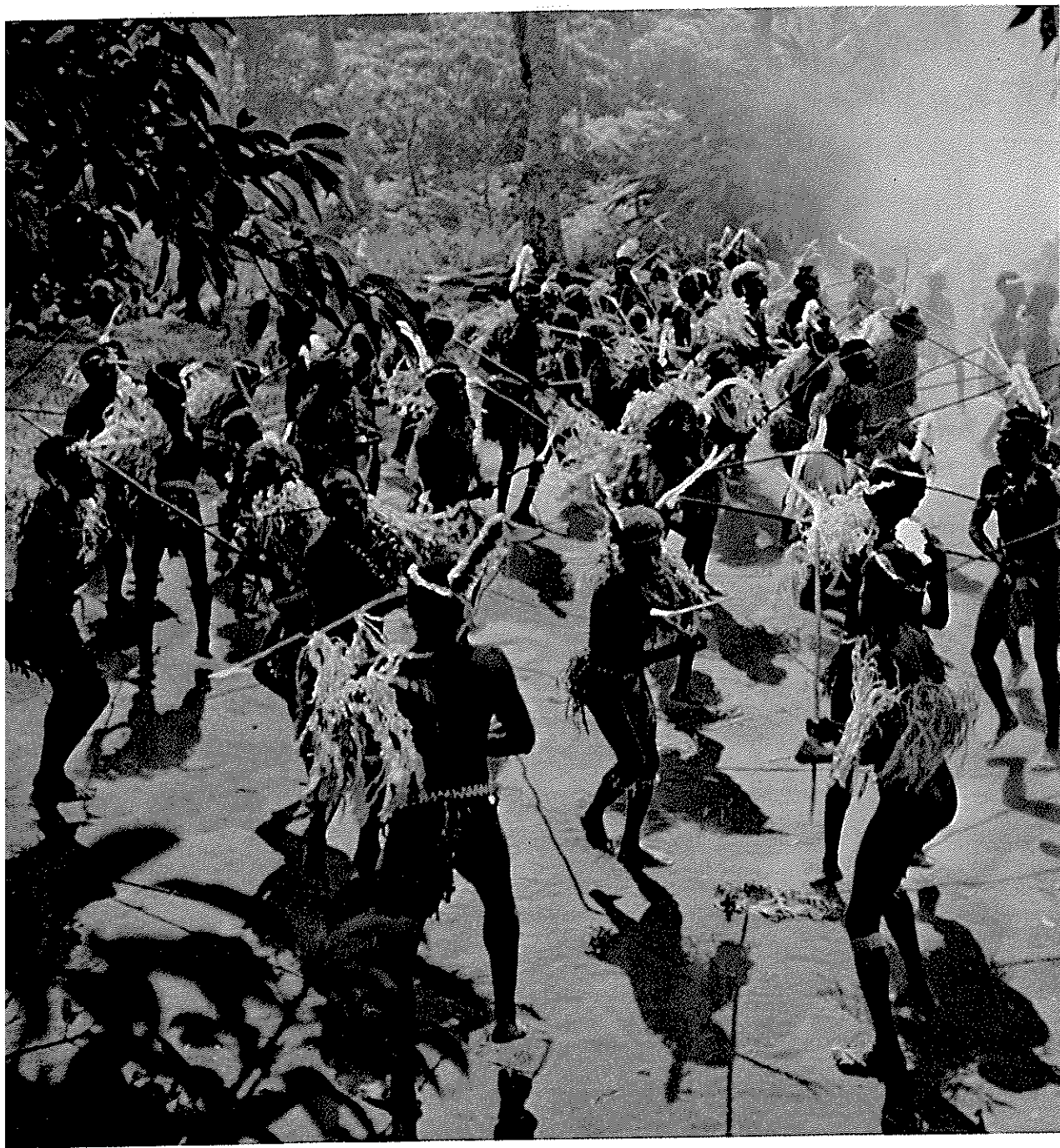


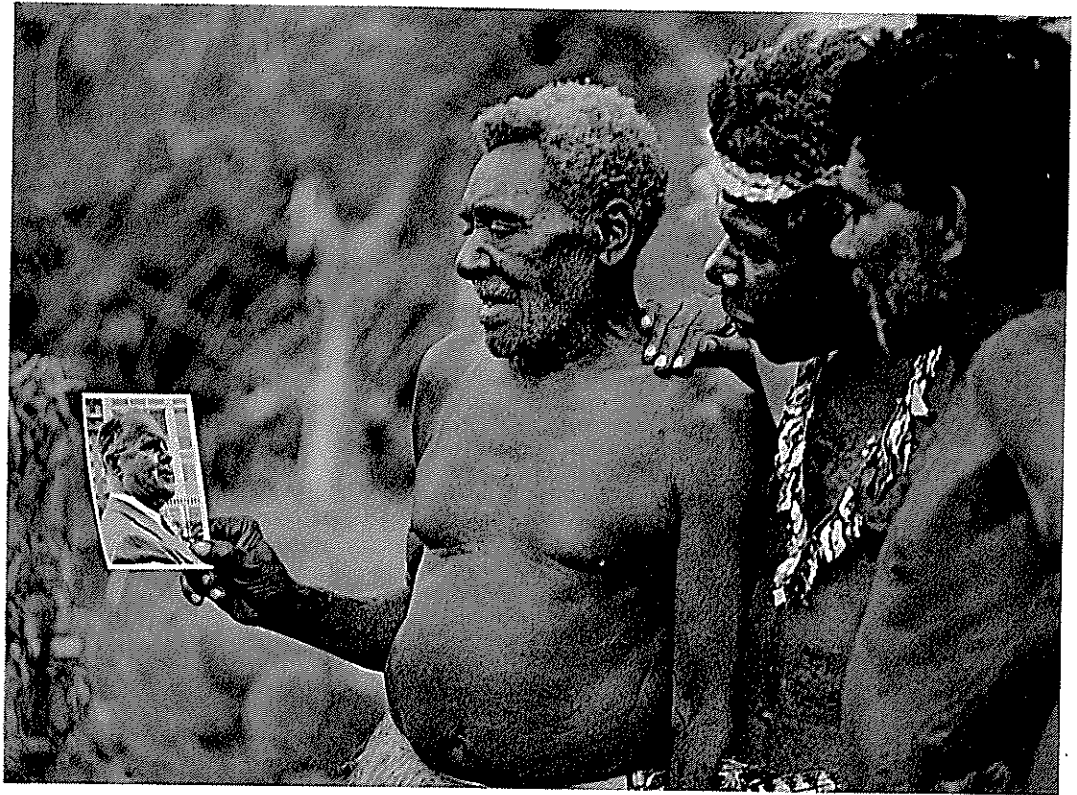
TREASURED RELICS bring to mind Tanna's brief brush with plenty. One islander proudly wears a souvenir of World War II—a discarded helmet liner (left). Others unveil a community hoard of Army trousers, dog tags, keys, and even U. S. currency (left, below) acquired when they worked alongside Navy Seabees. Their fondness for America stems not only from its wealth, but also from the war-time presence of black U. S. servicemen, who seemed to possess as much cargo as did white soldiers.

Unfortunately, the islanders' devotion to John Frum carries a high price. Believing that their savior lives in the United States, they generally refuse cooperation with New Hebridean authorities for fear of compromising their fidelity to Frum. Widespread confidence in Frum's ability to replenish any shortage once moved Tannese to convulse the island's economy by slaughtering their pigs, eating up all available food, and casting hard-earned local currency into the sea.

Although Frum fails to materialize—as has been the case for 35 years—his followers remain devout, often attributing his absence to their own shortcomings or to governmental intervention.

Administrators' attempts to discourage the cult only reinforce a conviction that European rulers want to keep the islanders cargo-poor. And so cultists cling to Frum in hopes of a better life, while Western critics see the movement marching a downhill road to unfulfilled promises and inevitable disappointment. At the festive nekowiari, I watch a brightly painted, apprehensive youngster ride atop his grandfather's shoulders (right) and I wonder: Will Tanna's generation of tomorrow continue to ride on today's beliefs? □



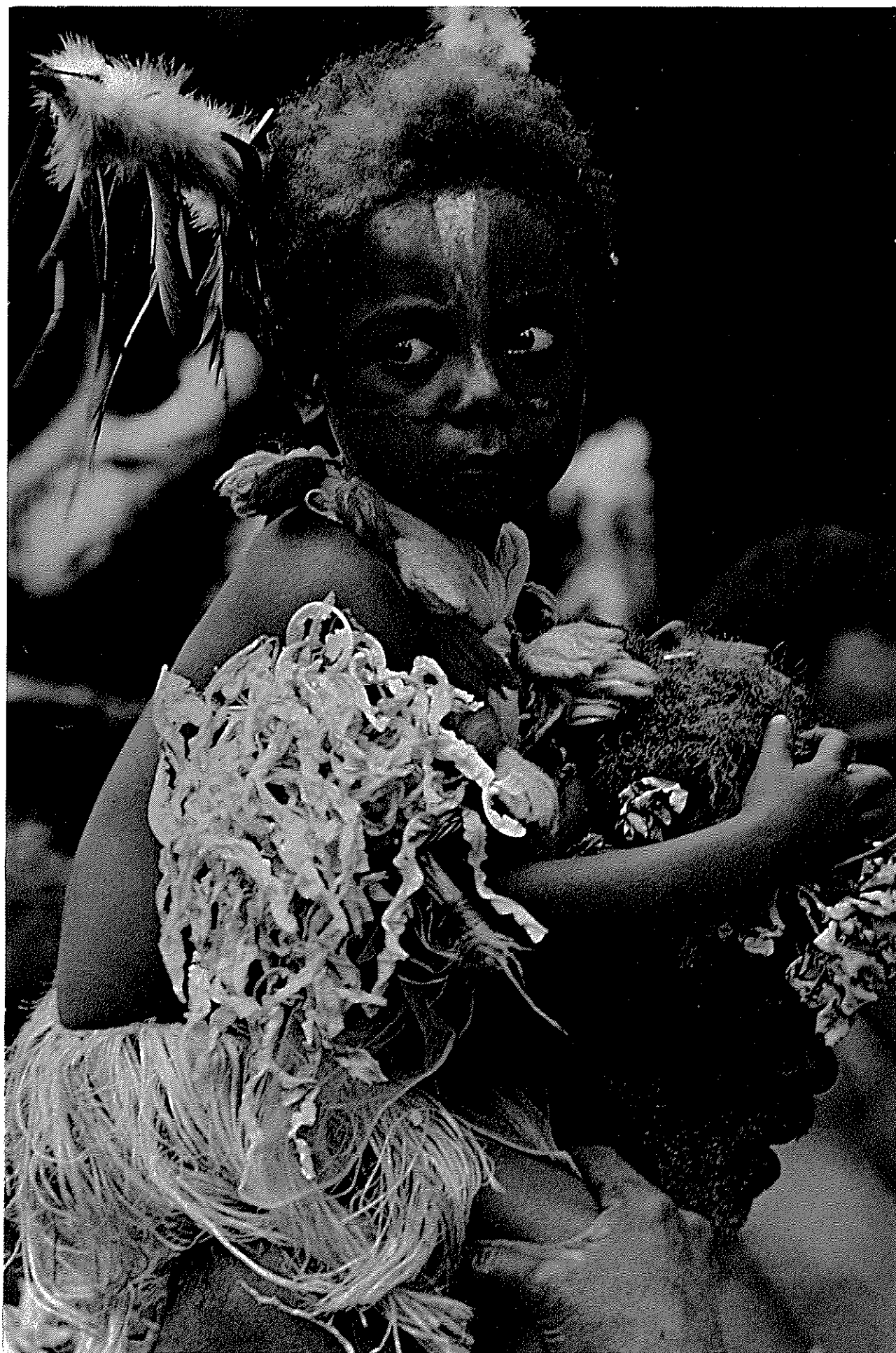


BACK to the Stone Age: Convinced that Tanna's changing culture has enraged John Frum, some islanders seek a return to traditional costume and ritual. At the recently revived ceremony called *nekowiav*, once held on the island every year or so, Tannese feast, dance, and sing, then each guest selects a slain pig to take home (left).

During the revelry, Tannese men reminisce over a photo of a wartime friend and construction foreman they call "Tom Navy" (above), a U. S. serviceman who paid them and issued supplies, unknowingly acting out John Frum's role. Celebrants asked me to take a group portrait (below) to show Frum they have re-adopted old ways.



Tanna Awaits the Coming of John Frum



NATURE'S AQUATIC ENGINEERS

Beavers

Article and photographs by
DES AND JEN BARTLETT

AS THE BEAVER APPROACHED, I lay motionless in the cold water. Through my face mask I could clearly see the transparent covering protecting each of the animal's eyes. It swam toward me with front feet held against its chest like tiny fists. Alternately thrusting with its large webbed hind feet—each as wide, when fully spread, as a ping-pong paddle—the animal glided so close it brushed against my camera housing. It showed no sign of alarm, but slowly expelled bubbles of air while rising gracefully to meet its own upside-down reflection. Then it broke through the surface and sighted my wife, Jen, and daughter, Julie, on the bank 35 yards away.

Crack! It slapped its tail down hard on the water and crash-dived in alarm, for man is the beaver's greatest enemy. Yet, in its underwater domain, this particular animal had shown no fear of me.

It was October and we were studying a beaver pond on Granite Creek in Wyoming. A thin film of ice was beginning to form, but below it was one of the most extensive winter caches of food we had seen—a 60-foot-long, 5-foot-high wall of willow branches, standing upright in the bottom mud, their tips barely poking through the ice.

We determined to stay for a while and make additional footage for our film *The*

Sleek submarine of the pond, a beaver dives for dinner. Once hunted almost to extinction, North America's *Castor canadensis* now stages a comeback, thanks to conservation and a change of fashion in hats and furs.

WILLIAM R. CURTSINGER

