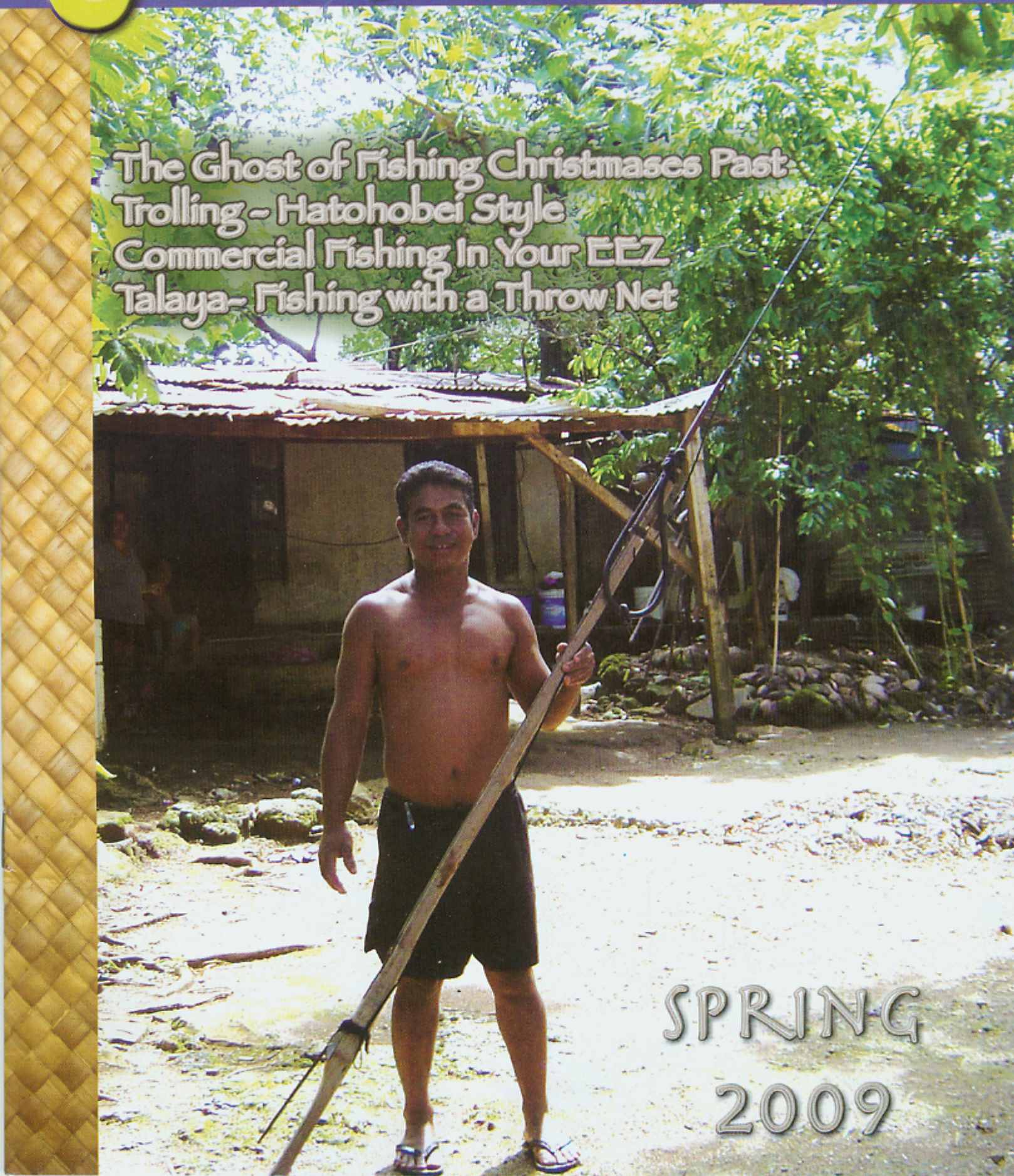


Journal of Micronesian Fishing

The Ghost of Fishing Christmases Past:
Trolling - Hatohobei Style
Commercial Fishing In Your EEZ
Talaya - Fishing with a Throw Net

SPRING
2009



Trolling-Hatohobei Style

Imagine the smell of fresh tuna fish and the burning sensation of the trolling line running in your hands with the sailing canoe moving through the wind and surfing the ocean swell gracefully in the early morning hours. This is what all tuna trollers enjoy on a typical fishing day on the island of Tobi, a small island in southwest region of Palau. Fishing almost as much a ritual as going to early morning Sunday church, except, tuna trolling is a daily ritual necessitated by the lack of modern amenities such as freezers or chillers to hold fresh yesterday's catch for today's consumption.

I am the oldest in a family of eight; seven boys and one girl. Though our father is blind and relies on me to assist him with everything that he needs to do, he is still a masterful fisherman. In the evening before the trolling day, my father describes to me the sizes and the different colors he wants for his trolling lures. I then go to work. I make up to 6 or 8 different lures, some big and some small. Chicken feathers are used for tuna lures, and we grow roosters with different feather colors to provide the needed materials. Red and blue cloth might also be used to dress up (skirt) the lures. Once the lures are done, I proceed to the canoe house to make sure all paddles, water bailers, and the canoe's sail are ready for the next day. I also inspect the canoe hull and outrigger parts and ties just to make sure all is secure. Before going to bed, we pray for good weather and good sailing wind.

The next morning, we rise early at 4:30 and push out the canoe from shore. Once we clear the reef line, we poke the sail up and drop our trolling line. My father asks me to scan the skies and the horizon for feeding seabirds and frigate birds-- indicators that tuna are present. As we troll, my dad constantly checks the swell directions, wind directions and where the birds are feeding. This information gives him the ability to tack or change sail directions once he feels the need. Frequency of tuna biting the bait and the sizes of tuna we start to catch dictate the size of the lures to use. Our distance from the island and the time of day also play a part on which color and what size of lures we will pull. Typically, the farther out from the island and the higher the sun is above the horizon, the bigger the lure we use.

Because my father teaches at the only elementary school on the island and there are no freezers and chillers to store more than what we need for the day, we return to the island with our catch around 7am. All the canoes that went out sail close to the channel where we launched and start reeling in their trolling lines. The mood is up and after an unspoken signal, the morning's trollers decide to race for the channel. This is the most exciting part of the trolling trips as we get to feel the sailing canoe surf the ocean swells while outriggers are pulled out of the water to make the canoe go faster. Once back on the beach, and the canoes are put away, we enjoy the results of our morning's efforts before going on with the rest of the day with the next day's trolling to look forward to

Justin Andrew

