

Contact Is Made With Molitones

Father Villamanan Pierces Jungles

James C. Dewey

August 8, 1961

BOGOTA. COLUMBIA (AP) — A Capuchin missionary has reported making permanent contact with the Motilon Indians, who for more than four centuries have lived in savage isolation in the mountainous jungle terrain along the Colombia-Venezuela border.

Fiercely resisting attempts to pacify them, the Motilones have been the scourge of settlers who since the discovery of oil in the Lake Maracaibo basin in the 1920s have been pushing deeper into the Indians' territory.

The contact between the Rev. Adolfo de Villamanan and the Motilones was made in July, 1960. It climaxed 13 years of slow, arduous work.

"In 1947 we began our campaign to penetrate the jungle and reach the Motilones," said Father Villamanan. "The advance had to be slow and gradual to give Motilon scouting parties a chance to look us over and familiarize themselves with us."

Now a permanent liaison has been established with the tribe, Father Villamanan said.

The Motilones are believed to have fled to the nearly impenetrable mountain jungles to escape the cruelty of the 16th century gold-seeking conquistadors. Subsequent attempts by missionaries, explorers, scientists and adventurers to reach the Indians proved futile.

They currently are thought to number about 5,000 but reports from the area say an epidemic., 1,000 perhaps of them smallpox, in the last six months.

Resisting encroachment, Motilon war parties armed' with primitive weapons made surprise attacks on isolated settlers outposts. Sometimes drought, flood or food shortages touched off foraging raids on settler camps. In an attempt to forestall such foraging, the government this Summer sponsored parachute drops of food into Motilon villages.

Air reconnaissance of the area has helped provide what little is known about the Motilones. Of 1 short stature. with features resembling the Carib Indian of the Antilles. their culture and language appear primitive. They live principally on fish, vegetables, corn and bananas.

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By JAMES C. DEWEY

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