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Office Memorandum • UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

TO : Dr. A. H. Seymour
Environmental Sciences Branch, DBM

DATE: February 13, 1958

FROM : Gordon M. Dunning, Chief, Radiation Effects of Weapons Branch
Division of Biology and Medicine *GMD*

SUBJECT: OPERATIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES

SYMBOL: DEM:REWB

There is a problem I would like to discuss with you on a subject we have talked about before. Our Division has the responsibility to support research for its own end. It also has the responsibility to meet obligations of a more operational nature. As Dr. Shilling once remarked, "We have to pay the rent." Perhaps it is even more than that - our responsibilities in one area are equally valid to those in another.

During the past year there have been three occasions that come to mind where we have not fully met the operational responsibilities, and thus laid our Division open to criticism. A resurvey of Rongelap Island should have been made prior to the return of the Rongelapese. I strongly recommended this to the Environmental Sciences Branch, but for what I am sure must have been good reasons it was not felt possible to do so. As a poor second alternative, I requested DMA to ask the Rad-Safe people of Holmes and Narver to make external gamma measurements. They did a very nice job, but of course these measurements represented only a small part of the data we should have obtained.

After the return of the Rongelapese we were surprised to learn that about ten or so of them had taken up permanent residence on Aneatok Island to the north. Since this Island was initially more heavily contaminated than Rongelap, it was essential that we obtain data there comparable to those from Rongelap. The Department of State learned of this situation and strongly recommended that such a survey be made without delay. After discussion with the Environmental Sciences Branch you decided that it was not possible to make this survey, so that once again I had to turn to another Division (DMA) and have measurements of external gamma taken on Aneatok Island. We still do not have the essential data on foodstuffs from Aneatok Island, and I truly hope that the survey that is about to start on Rongelap Atoll will include this.

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Dr. A. H. Seymour

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As you recall, the only restriction that we placed upon the return of the Rongelapese was that they should not eat land crabs, since the last survey showed an unusually high amount of Strontium-90 in their soft tissues. Although we are sure the Rongelapese can live comfortably without eating land crabs, it nevertheless became a problem for other than strictly health reasons. Therefore, when the last survey was made (July 1957) we made a strong point of collecting land crabs and reporting their values at the very earliest possible moment. By the middle of October we had not received such data and again requested it. We still had not received the data by the early part of February 1958 when Dr. Conard reopened this question, since he was returning for his annual visit with the Rongelapese. Upon further request the data were transmitted to us, based on only two land crabs collected on Rongelap (and incidentally the two numbers of concentration in the muscle differing by a factor of 12). I fully appreciate the rather extreme hardships in making such collections, but be that as it may, it still leaves us with inadequate data to do our job.

I would be happy to sit down with you or anyone else at any time to see if we can coordinate our efforts and responsibilities more fully.

cc: Dr. Dunham
Dr. Shilling
Dr. Western

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