UNIQUE DOCUMENT # SAB2000-335A001

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
OFFICE OF TERRITORIES
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20240

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DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY DECLASSIFICATION REVIEW
1ST REVIEWER-DATE: 6-97
AUTHORITY: CLASS / ADD
NAME: [illegible]
2ND REVIEWER-DATE: 6/6/97
AUTHORITY: ADD
NAME: A.R. Schmitt
DETERMINATION (CIRCLE NUMBER(S))
1. CLASSIFICATION RETAINED
2. CLASSIFICATION CHANGED TO: ____
3. CONTAINS NO DOE CLASSIFIED INFO
4. COORDINATE WITH: Interior
5. CLASSIFICATION CANCELLED
6. CLASSIFIED INFO BRACKETED

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JAN 30 1967

Honorable William R. Norwood
High Commissioner of the Trust Territory
of the Pacific Islands
Saipan, Mariana Islands

Dear Mr. Norwood:

This will acknowledge your letter of January 16 regarding the Kili-Bikini population and is also in amplification of my radio message of January 24 concerning a scientific visit to Bikini.

Your letter arrived just before we had a meeting with representatives of the AEC and the National Radiation Council concerning the possible return of the people of Bikini to their atoll. Essentially the first consideration was whether the data on hand indicated that conditions are such as to preclude the possible return of the people or, if not, whether a further study should be undertaken. While radiation levels are high in many parts of the atoll, and there are questions with respect to certain foodstuffs, it was decided that the matter merited further study.

Dr. Conard was among those who attended the meeting and he pointed out that the ship picking up his party and equipment on Rongelap on March 15 might be diverted to Bikini to offload the Bikini party and their equipment. This would mean the ship would leave Kwajalein with the Bikini team a day or so early stopping by Rongelap en route so that the Conard group could be picked up on Rmyo in time for their medical examinations there. This would be feasible if the Bikini party could then be picked up some two to four weeks later. Flying the party in would not seem to be feasible in view of the gear which the group would require. There is, however, an airstrip on Rmyo island which might still be serviceable and another on Bikini which is completely overgrown.

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1ST REVIEW-DATE: 9/13/95	3. CONTAINS NO DOE CLASSIFIED INFO
AUTHORITY: DERIVATIVE CLASSIFIER	4. COORDINATE WITH:
NAME: H.B. Richards	5. CLASSIFICATION CANCELLED
2ND REVIEW-DATE:	6. CLASSIFIED INFO BRACKETED
AUTHORITY: ADD	7. OTHER (SPECIFY): DOE/OC
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Bikini is a roughly rectangular atoll with Rmua in the northwest corner, Bikini in the northeast corner, and Enyu in the southeast corner being the largest islands. Rmua is almost completely denuded of top-soil and, entirely aside from radioactivity, would be unsuitable for agriculture or habitation. It and a number of the smaller northern islands are, however, the nesting grounds of sizeable flocks of birds, some of which have varying degrees of radioactivity. It might be necessary to restrict access to these islands, as well as to the southern islands which also seem to have a number of hot spots. Bikini and Enyu have the least radioactivity and are the islands on which the people might be able to sustain themselves. Additional studies need to be made, however, since the 1954 sampling gave only limited information with respect to activity levels on the interior of the islands, which were relatively high. Most sampling was done on the perimeter of the islands and beach samples were relatively low. Additional sampling needs to be done with respect to soils, plants and, possibly, some of the animal life on these two islands.

The task is made difficult because Bikini and Enyu are covered by a dense, almost impenetrable, growth of messerschmidia and scaevola. The team will need to have chain saws and brush cutters to be able to carry out its task. There seem to be few plants of any economic value growing on the islands; the coconut plantations of pre-test days are gone and only a few trees remain. There is some pandanus--which has a high radioactivity level--but, apparently little else except scrub growth. Before the people could return, if it is concluded that it is safe for them to do so, a clearing and replanting program will be required. The soil on Bikini was reported as good, but we asked about your agriculturist in order that you, we, and the AEC might have expert advice as to what can be done with respect to replanting and how soon the returned people could turn from imported food and begin to live on plants and animals growing on the islands. This has relevance to the intake of radioactive materials, from the scientific standpoint, and it has significance to you and to us in terms of the rehabilitation program which will be required. We also need to know whether Bikini and Enyu alone can reasonably be expected to support the 300 or so people who would be expected to return since it is possible that the remaining islands would be barred to them except for limited visits. The atoll is in a dry region which limits agricultural productivity.

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Bikini was the original village site of the people, but Rongerik has a pier and an airstrip that was operable a year or so ago. This is getting somewhat ahead of our health question, but we should like to know whether the people might be willing to re-establish themselves on Rongerik with its superior transportation facilities or whether they would insist upon Bikini. If cleared, we may find a serviceable strip on Bikini. We need also to know how dependent the people are upon eating shore birds versus sea birds (and their eggs). The shore birds have higher radioactivity levels than the sea birds. We need to know more about the people's current diets, particularly in terms of their reliance on imported foods as compared to local produce, since this, again, will have a major effect on the intake of radioactive elements. We recognize that a feeding program will be required for several years, but the level of residual radioactivity in and on the islands will probably not decrease much in that interval. It was suggested that an anthropologist accompany the group and there are two in Hawaii who might be useful. Jack Tobin, who has done quite a bit of work with the Enivetok people, and Leonard Mason, who has worked with the Bikini people, are the two possibilities. We lean to Professor Mason because of his continuing association with the Bikini people. The team might, however, get the information it needs by consulting with him in Honolulu.

The team itself will probably be headed by Mr. Al Held of the University of Washington who had done considerable work in the area. He would be accompanied by one or two radiological physicists, your agriculturist, possibly an anthropologist, and four or five Marshallese to serve as brush-cutters and to assist in the camp. Thus, there will probably be from eight to ten persons involved with a fair amount of gear. Can the Trust Territory provide camping gear for such a group--tents, cooking equipment, food, etc.--and fuel for the cars and any other mechanized equipment the team may have with it? Dr. Conard stated that his team will have a 14-foot aluminum outboard motorboat which could be lent to the Bikini team for travel between the islands of the atoll.

We need to know most urgently whether the ship can make the mid-March and end-of-March sailings between Kwajalein and Bikini and whether or not you have a coral-atoll experienced agriculturist to assign to the

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team. The last item, on a somewhat lesser priority, is whether or not the Trust Territory can contribute the camping gear, food, fuel, and related supplies to the team. We realize that in this case a definitive commitment is dependent upon a listing of the specific items required.

A radio response to these questions will be appreciated. The AEC and we are most anxious to move along with this question, as I know you are.

Sincerely yours,

(Sgd.) Mrs. Ruth G. Van Cleve

Mrs. Ruth G. Van Cleve
Director

cc: Dr. C. L. Dunham
AEC

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