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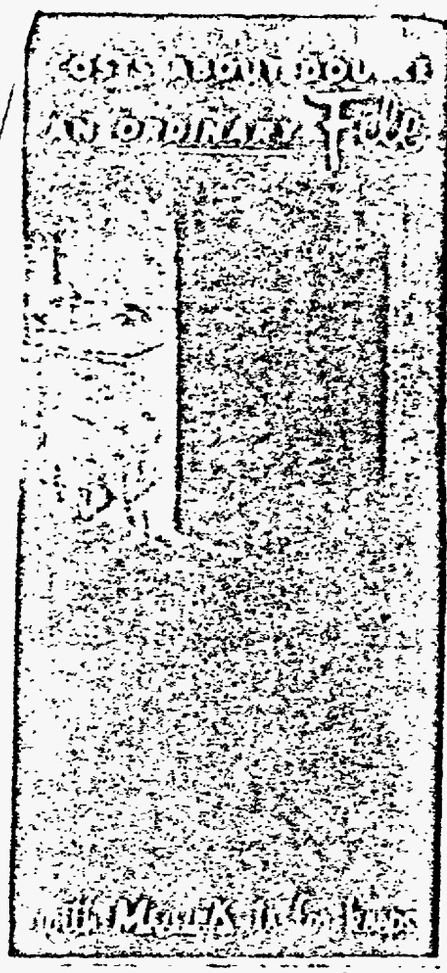

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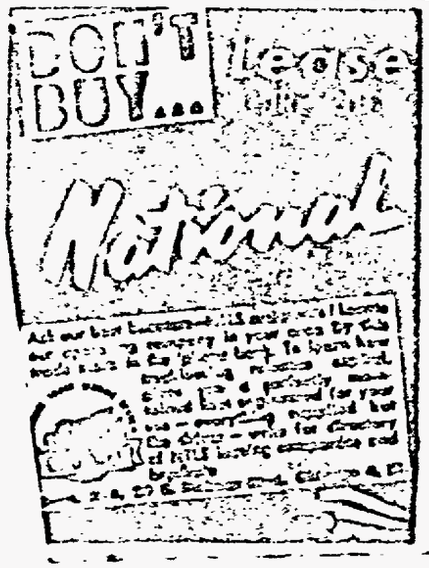

After the H-bomb a-bee: Is he cured or doomed?

H-Bomb Victims

On the surface, the 23 hapless Japanese tuna fishermen showered with the radioactive ash that fell out of the Bikini H bomb cloud on March 1 were in good shape last week. Their angry rashes had all but subsided. Those who had lost their hair had grown a new crop. On the basis of urinalyses made over the last few months, U.S. radiation experts figured the crew were well out of danger.

But the latest Japanese bulletin on the crew of the Fukuryu Maru (Lucky Dragon) maintained their prospects could hardly be worse. A brief medical résumé to reporters said the victims still showed internal traces of two radioactive elements—strontium 90 and plutonium 239—pumping out radiation sufficient to disintegrate the fishermen's bone structure completely in seven years. Before that, Japanese doctors said they expected cancer to develop.

Later, reports from Tokyo said that the U.S. had agreed to up its ante on damages from an earlier $500,000 offer to $1 million. If accepted, most of the money would go to the fishermen, the rest, to cover loss of fish catches because of possible radioactivity.

Throughout the medico-diplomatic wrangling, Japanese newspapers regularly run items about radioactive rain, "hot" vegetables and milk, even radioactive snow on mountaintops. In conversation, objectionable people are marked "Bikini types", mothers get out of buying ice cream for their children with the excuse that "it is Bikini affected."

Outside of the Lucky Dragon crew, however, there is no evidence that anyone in Japan has suffered anything but imaginary symptoms from the H bomb explosions, and there are signs that the hysteria is on the wane. Retail sales of tuna have climbed back to within 25 per cent of normal. Though all sea water has been repeatedly termed dangerous, crowds at Japanese beaches have been bigger this summer than in any season since the second world war.

Pulverizing Medicine

Look for some important men in the field of statistics to open up on premature findings in the cigarette-cancer controversy. A specific target will be a recent American Cancer Society report by Drs. E. Cuyler Hammond and Daniel Horn, declaring that smoking does tend to cause cancer. The statisticians' point: Correlation is not necessarily causation and it's probably still much too early for anything like conclusions ... Efforts to close in on the common cold will be stepped up this fall. Congress is okaying more funds for a Public Health Service anti-cold project. The Army is launching a project using hundreds of volunteers.