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 Enewetak

TO : W.E. Newvik, Tech Dir, NVOO  
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 FROM : J.A. Tobin, Community Development Advisor, Marshalls District, TTPI.  
 (On special assignment on Enewetak).

10/16/72

SUBJECT: Info requested by you in re specific needs of returning Marshallese, to Enewetak Atoll.

It should be understood and emphasized that the following information is tentative. It is based on my knowledge of the Marshallese in general and the former inhabitants of Enewetak in particular. It is not official information. Specific answers must be obtained from these people themselves before specific plans and commitments are made.

When I return to Majuro next week I will attempt to gather more data. However, as I told both you and Roger Ray, I feel that the answers must come from the Enewetak People themselves and that a meeting on Ujilang between you (AEC) and other appropriate representatives and the community is absolutely essential. Planning must be mutually understood and the Enewetak People must be involved in all significant aspects of the planning. This is, of course, the avowed and often stated Trust Territory policy. It will be of mutual benefit, will facilitate the operation, and avoid future repercussions if this policy is adhered to. I understand that both you and Roger Ray understand this and agree with it.

The tentative answers to your questions follow, in the order posed:

1.) We have not been told exactly how many people will return initially. The leaders have stated that an initial group wants to come to Jabtan as soon as possible. I am not sure exactly how many this will be. Although a number has been given to TTPI.

Eventually all, or most of the people will return. Even those few living on Majuro (25-30 plus or minus) will return if just to visit. Some of the people may wish to live on Ujilang part of the time and on Enewetak part of the time. However a firm answer can only come from the community.

The 1972 government census, conducted by Marshallese administrative personnel gives a total of 281 on Ujilang. With the 25-30 (estim.) on Majuro and elsewhere gives a rough population figure of 350 plus or minus. I believe the figure quoted by the media to be 400. An up-to-date census can be made.

The population is about evenly divided between males and females. It is a young population with few very old people, and many children. (I can obtain a detailed age-sex breakdown for you I am sure. But it will take time.)

I think we can go on the assumption that all of those who possess land rights on Enewetak Atoll will want to return eventually. All will insist on having housing provided as well as any other benefits available. (This is the voiced desire of the Bikini People).

2.) I assume that they will follow the traditional living pattern and pattern of exploitation of the natural resources. That is, there may be two main settlements, one on Enewetak Island and one on Enjebi Island, the respective traditional "headquarters" of the two socio-political groups: the Enjebi People (Dri Enjebi)

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and the Enewetak People (Iri Enewetak). These two traditional groups are, however for all practical purposes one group due to inter-marriage. They do however maintain the distinction.

Chief (Iroi) Joanej is the head of the Enewetak People and Chief Lorenja is the head of the Enjebi group.

Political power has shifted to the elected magistrate and the council, composed of family heads. The incumbent magistrate is Smith Gidoon. The chiefs are members of the council and their power is effective, however it has waned considerably. The younger men, including the sons of the chiefs have a great deal to say these days.

Decision making is not unilateral, nor, apparently was it ever. Consensus is obtained in council meetings, attended by almost everyone in the community when important issues are to be discussed.

This is the method followed throughout most Micronesian communities. For this reason it is obviously very important to deal with the council when possible; to do so whenever planning which will affect the people of the community is to be done.

As a matter of expediency representatives who may be available at the time can and have been used. However it is obviously desirable to obtain community consensus if possible.

If the radioactivity on Enjebi should prevent permanent habitation at this time, and for a significant period of time in the future the duality of settlement may not be possible. The Enjebi People may choose to live together on Enewetak Island or on another island in the northern sector of the atoll. However, it is not certain that they would want to have two main settlements. They may decide to live in one settlement. As a matter of expediency the two groups live together on Ujilang with a "boundary" set through the middle of the island and the satellite islands divided equally. The community buildings: church, school, dispensary, warehouses, etc. are located in the area on the dividing line.

The point is that they do live together and may wish to continue this. However, they may very well wish to return to the pattern which was possible on much larger Enewetak Atoll.

The traditional Marshallase pattern of habitation and exploitation of the natural resources is to live on a main (large) island in the atoll, make copra, practice a low level (technologically) agriculture, and exploit the marine resources of sea, lagoon and surrounding reefs. The school, dispensary, church, council house, warehouse, stores and any other activities' buildings serving the needs of the community are located on the main island, or islands in the case of the larger and more populous atolls.

A semi-migratory form of exploitation of the natural resources is followed in that the other smaller islands, satellite islands of the atoll are visited from time to time. The holders of land rights on these islands make copra (the cash crop), gather breadfruit, pandanus, coconuts, arrowroot, and other vegetable foods in season. They also exploit the marine resources. Clearing of brush and planting is also done at this time.

Houses and water catchments usually of a fairly simple nature are found on the more economically important of these smaller islands.

The visits vary in duration according to the amount of work to be accomplished and in some instances, according to weather conditions. At times it is not feasible to return to the main settlement due to unfavorable weather. It should be explained that this is a highly mobile population, as are most Marshallese. There will be a great deal of travel between all of the islands of Enewetak Atoll throughout the year, every year.

The people are highly oriented toward the sea and lagoon and love to travel. This orientation and pattern will undoubtedly continue after return to Enewetak. I presume that curiosity stimulated by a more than 25 year absence on the part of the older generation and of complete ignorance of the atoll on the part of those either born since the removal in 1947 or who were small children at the time, will stimulate a great deal of travel in the initial period of resettlement.

Again I strongly advise that no firm decision be made in regard to construction of facilities and future settlement pattern (village sites, etc.) without first obtaining the wishes, advice, and consent of the Enewetak People.

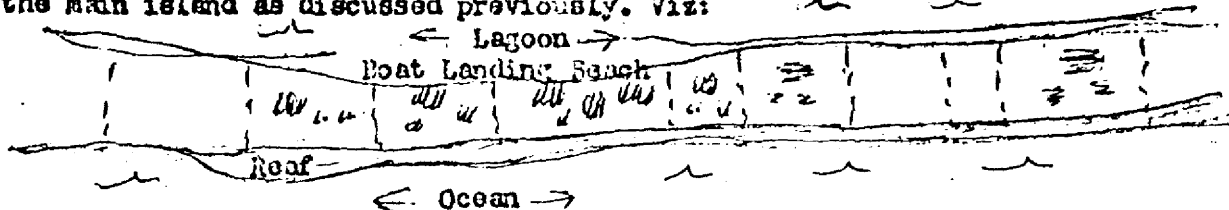
3.) I assume that the people will want all of the islands to be planted wherever possible. This means that all debris will have to be removed, and all brush cleared (except for the important shelter belt and other protective cover as deemed necessary by TT agricultural experts.

The people will of course want the surface, the terrain in its original condition where possible. This means of course that the gullies and large holes must be filled as was done on Bikini in 1969.

The question of future use of the airstrip and other facilities on Enewetak Island is of course a highly important one. I assume that the people will want the strip to be saved for commercial and emergency use. The open areas will be needed for coconut groves and subsistence crops. I assume that the people will want the buildings which are in good condition to remain in situ. Here again, the decision must come from the Enewetak People. I know that they will want all useful materials and buildings for their future use. They have stated this.

It should be borne in mind that the people have rights in more than one piece of land and on different islands throughout the atoll.

Land rights are owned and held by kin groups. The land parcels are worked by the members of the lineage which holds these rights which are normally chiefly inherited at birth. The traditional pattern of habitation is for households (family groups) to live on their land, not in a village cluster. That is, in a scattered pattern. The community buildings are, however, normally centralized on the main island as discussed previously. Viz:



This is the pattern followed on Ujilang and will probably be perpetuated on Enewetak. Here again the Enewetak community will voice their desires in this matter.

4.) The people practice a rather non-intensive type of agriculture but utilize the environment to the maximum, using the plants that can survive and produce in this atoll environment. Copra is made for cash sale to the visiting field trip ship. Consumer goods are purchased from these ships with the proceeds of the copra sales. The interest payments from the trust funds also help buy needed commodities. Rice, flour, sugar, canned meats and other canned goods are staple items of the diet and have been for many years. Fish, clams, langusta, turtles (flesh and eggs), sea birds (flesh and eggs), chickens and pigs provide protein in the diet. The marine resources are very important in the diet of these people.

Coconuts, pandanus, breadfruit, and arrowroot are the main vegetable products used. Bananas, papaya, and squash are used to a lesser extent, probably due to the relative scarcity of the banana and papaya. They do not seem to grow well, at least on Ujilang.

The diet upon return to Enewetak will of course not include breadfruit (grown locally) or pandanus, or coconut to any significant extent until the trees start producing. There will be a marked increase in the amount of marine products eaten however. This is of course because more fish, shellfish, etc. will be available due to the much larger size of lagoon and reefs on Enewetak. viz:

Ujilang Lagoon Area: 25.47 square miles.  
Enewetak Lagoon Area: 387.99 square miles.

The produce from the land should also eventually be tremendously increased, commensurate with the larger land area of Enewetak. viz:

Ujilang Dry Land Area: 0.67 square miles.  
Enewetak Dry Land Area: 2.26 square miles.

It is anticipated that a great deal more imported foods: rice, flour, etc. will be consumed to replace the amounts of local vegetable foods that will not be available for a number of years. Data on crop maturation can be obtained from our Trust Territory agricultural experts.

The people spend their working time clearing brush and planting, when appropriate, in making copra; gathering subsistence crops in season, and exploiting the marine resources. Other routine tasks such as preparing food for meals and regular household work accounts for the rest of the working time.

To recapitulate: the local foods available to the Enewetak People now, and for some years to come are:

- 1.) Fish and other marine products in large quantities and varieties apparently. Very important in the daily diet.
- 2.) Seabirds (flesh and eggs), amount unknown to me but a highly valued food item.
- 3.) Crabs, including coconut crabs. Amount available unknown to me.
- 4.) Turtles (flesh and eggs), amount unknown to me but a highly valued food.
- 5.) Coconuts, limited quantity apparently. A traditional staple food item.
- 6.) Arrowroot, amount unknown to me but apparently limited. This is also a traditional staple.
- 7.) Breadfruit, none reported or known to me.

- 8.) Edible pandanus, none known to me. Apparently limited if existent. A traditional staple. Note: Pandanus leaves are very important for mats for household use and export, and for other handicrafts.
- 9.) Bananas, none now but may bear fruit a year or so after planting. (A luxury food, not a staple. The same applies to papaya.

On Ujilang:

The people normally have a good seasonal supply of breadfruit available on Ujilang now and use it as a staple both fresh (prepared) and preserved for storage in pits and future use. They have a good seasonal supply of pandanus, coconuts year round and seasonal arrowroot, and a lesser supply of bananas, papayas and squash.

Ultimately the diet on Enewetak will include all of the foods now consumed on Ujilang, plus the larger variety and greater quantity of edible marine biota available on Enewetak.

Jack A. Tobin