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March 28, 1974

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U. S. Atomic Energy Commission
Washington, D. C. 20545

REPOSITORY

P.N.N.L.

COLLECTION

Marshall Islands

BOX No.

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FOLDER

Enewetak 1974

Dear Tommy,

I make this a personal letter for a number of very personal reasons. First and foremost is my respect for you and my desire not to complicate your already difficult position. Too, I find that I have personal convictions which I cannot properly ask my boss to endorse without also asking him to expend the effort to become as well-informed as I think but few of us are on the very complex radio-bio-geo-political-cultural-economic puzzle that we have been troubled with for the past couple of years. I defer, without question or reservation, to your superior knowledge of Bikini's recent history and, again without question or reservation, to your knowledge and judgment regarding standards and criteria. I am most grateful for our dialog of the past two years and our continuing exchange of confidence. Both of us, I think, have arrived - albeit by different routes - at a common commitment: to do that, which intellect and conscience will permit, to see the birthright of the people of Bikini and Enewetak restored.

You have met the Bikini people; you have talked with them, and you have been privileged to be instrumental in the steps toward their return. I have met some of them, too, and it was a joyous occasion that we witnessed when three little families stepped off an ancient LCM on February 4th to start a new life in a strange land called "home".

I have also met a number of the Enewetak people - perhaps 20 of them - over these two years - and I must admit that just by that fact of many exposures over a long time I have unavoidably become more personally involved in their destiny than in that of the Bikinians - not more interested, just more personally involved.

There is another difference - grossly more difficult for me to quantify - and that is the different world in which we live, compared with the world which existed four and five and six years

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ago when decisions were being made regarding Bikini which are related to today's Enewetak imperatives. One important difference which I see is the emergence of people like Chips Barry, of Micronesian Legal Services, as really solidly committed champions of the rights and interests of the people. By omitting Mitchell's name from that comment, I mean him no slight; I simply do not know him well enough to give him such an endorsement, but neither do I have any reason to question his integrity nor his commitment. I believe in Chips Barry's motivation, intelligence and integrity, and I do not believe that he considers us as adversaries. I think we need him and the application of his talents and interest to our goal.

That's a very long introduction, but now let me give you my perspective of Enewetak on March 28, 1974. First, the people understand that it is their land and they have been promised a return (semantic niceties in Haydn Williams' announcement notwithstanding). They understand also that they are not powerless - witness PACE, wherein a "nation" of 432 people challenged the mightiest "superpower" of the world in its own courts and proved to the world that we are a nation of laws which on occasion protect even the little guy. (Why we haven't found a way to tell that story to the world, I don't know. It's the kind of thing that makes me proud to raise the flag on my front lawn, in spite of Watergate.) The people also have come a long way in two years toward being prepared to understand and accept some of the complex concepts of our society. Considering the availability of the MLSC people, whose legitimacy as Counsel is, I think, not seriously subject to question, I submit that there is little room left for the kind of paternalism which has characterized some of our earlier relationships. The imperative of the present situation is, I believe, to build upon what we now observe, an informed capacity for self-determination. In our official capacities, of course, we can and must be concerned about whether the people have sufficient knowledge, intelligence and experience to make valid judgments (note I did not say "right" judgments). I am confident that - given time - we can help them to acquire the knowledge; I am confident that they have the intelligence; and I am confident that the lessons of pertinent experience can be brought to bear without too great an intrusion on their self-determination.

Now let me get to specifics. Let us take first the matter of the survey report. As you know, I have felt from the earliest days of that activity that the people of Enewetak (and their retained counsel) were entitled to full disclosure of all of the information which we have gathered about their home. No temporizing, no interpreting, no censoring: just the facts. Unless you can invoke some

principle, unknown to me, which would deny the people that right, I fail to see the sense of an argument which has occupied our masters in Washington for more than a month. On Tuesday we got the right answer, but for the wrong reason. My flag hung a little limp when the matter was finally decided upon the question of whether we might get caught:

Next let's talk about an early return to Japtan. The people of Enewetak have raised this question. This is not Mitchell. It has no sinister overtones. It is a sovereign, gentle people acknowledging that for reasons they do not pretend to understand, they cannot have their entire atoll now and without reservations, but asking for an earnest of our intentions and an opportunity to participate in our future actions. I am concerned, as you are, about the potential consequences, should the people on Japtan decide to ignore our advice about Runit or Engebi or Aomon. But that is our problem, not theirs! And we can't in good conscience solve it by denying them their rights when for a price which can be expressed in dollars - or inconvenience - or even bad press - we can solve it at our expense rather than theirs. I want them back on Japtan - tomorrow, if that were possible - and I strongly believe that if we were to take the initiative in making that happen, we would have done more for our lasting relationship with the Enewetak people than any other action I can now contemplate. What are the risks? They are definable and measurable. If people go to Japtan tomorrow, they must be persuaded to stay away from Runit and the northern islands. Oscar DeBrum says he can give us an assurance of that. I believe him, but if someone else doesn't, I submit that for a fraction of the cleanup cost we can police such a restriction a hell of a lot more effectively than we police some of our other worries. If the people of Enewetak ask us if Japtan is safe for human habitation, I think they deserve an honest answer now. Had I the authority, I would do everything in my power to encourage that move. But let me turn to a not very pleasant alternative: It takes a not very sophisticated reader (if we don't give an honest or timely answer) to decide for himself, from the survey report, that Japtan is indeed safe. Then suppose that the people, without asking, simply return to Japtan. Now, where are we? I needn't pursue that further, and I choose not to because of my belief that if we take this line of reasoning, we can at best make the right decision for the wrong reason.

Finally, a word about Engebi. I do not pretend any wisdom here either. But I would hope that, whatever we say about that island we say in a very positive sense. The most positive things we can

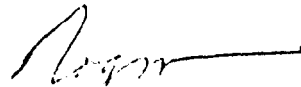
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do will be to involve the people in finding a solution and to permit them to be involved in its implementation. Again, even if it takes 20 years for us to reach what we feel is a comfortable accommodation with the Engebi problem, our success, I feel, will be strongly influenced by the degree of meaningful participation by the Engebi people. This perhaps should be the subject of another conversation.

Regards,



Roger Ray, Assistant Manager
for Operations