

MARSHALL ISLANDS FILE TRACKING DOCUMENT

Record Number: 472

File Name (TITLE): MEMORANDUM ON ASSOCIATED PRESS (AP) REPORTER'S VISIT TO MARSHALL ISLANDS (Utirik Resettlement)

Document Number (ID): MEMO

DATE: 5/27/54

Previous Location (FROM): DOE HQ FILES, Access# 326-78, Box 3,

AUTHOR: M. Salisbury File: NMB-B

Additional Information: Includes Reason why Utirik people were returned to Utirik

Unclassified

Recently Declassified

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May 27, 1954

TO: Louis L. Starnes, Chairman
E. B. Nichols, General Manager

FROM: Morse Salisbury, Director
Division of Information Services

(Handwritten initials)
472

AP REPORTER'S VISIT TO MARSHALL ISLANDS

SYNOPSIS

Bill Naugh, Associated Press reporter at Honolulu, at the direction of the New York AP office, requested permission to visit Bikini to interview the natives evacuated from Rongerik and Ujae, and to go to Majuro to talk with native representatives at that island about the Marshallese petition. Request for Naugh's visit was relayed from the Navy Department on May 17, 1954 with a message that the High Commissioner of the UN Trust Territory had approved the visit. The Navy was agreeable to furnishing transportation provided the AEC and DOD approved.

After consultation with the Office of Public Information, Department of Defense and with the Director of Division of Military Application and the General Manager, we agreed that the AP man should be permitted to make the trip provided his articles were subject to review because:

1. With authority from the High Commissioner to make the visit, the AP representative could hardly be denied military or trust territory transportation to make the visit.
2. It would be more advantageous for the government for the Associated Press, the most reliable of U. S. news agencies, to cover the story under approved conditions than for a sensational type reporter to visit the area without our knowledge.

We therefore concurred in the Navy's furnishing transportation provided the AP agreed to submit material to Washington for review prior to publication by the Department of Defense and AEC. It is our understanding from the Washington AP Bureau that Naugh already has started his trip and that his copy will be transmitted to Washington by Navy radio facilities when he returns to Honolulu with a story.

On May 21, 1954 General Clark, in connection with the visit by the AP reporter, recommended that he furnish the AP reporter information on the events affecting the natives to prevent inaccuracies and misinterpretation of material the reporter would obtain during his visit.

In reply to this suggestion, the Joint Task Force prepared, and Military Applications and Information reviewed, a message to General Clark containing the following material for the guidance of the AP reporter, but not for attribution to official sources:

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COPY FOR DR. BUCHER, B&M

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CONFIRMED TO BE UNCLASSIFIED
AUTHORITY: DOD/CA-20
BY H.R. SUMMERS, DATE:
11/18/94

Lewis L. Strauss, Chairman
K. A. Nichols, General Manager

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May 27, 1954

" On March 1, the first detonation of test series took place. As AEC Chairman Strauss stated, this detonation was larger than expected. Radioactive debris fell on several inhabited atolls in Marshall Islands. On subsequent shots in test series no significant fall-out on uninhabited areas occurred. On March 2, I learned that the inhabited islands of Rongelap, Rongerik and Utrik had received considerable fall-out so that it appeared necessary to evacuate certain U.S. personnel and Marshall Island natives. The evacuation was performed within the next two days by Task Force destroyers and ACFT.

"This evacuation of 82 Rongelap natives, 154 Utrik natives and 28 U. S. personnel from Rongerik to Naval Station at Kwajalein has been mentioned previously in the press. When the natives were advised of situation they participated willingly in evacuation which was accomplished quickly and without incident.

"At Kwajalein the natives were placed under careful medical surveillance and treatment. It soon became apparent that Utrik natives had not received serious exposures. When it was determined that they would not suffer physically they were moved to another island in the Kwajalein Atoll where they have remained under the care of Commander Naval Station at Kwajalein. The Rongelap natives received greater exposures which caused temporary lowering of blood counts, instances of temporary epilation and skin lesions. There have been no fatalities and none will result from the exposures received.

"A medical unit from Naval Medical Research Institute and other service agencies began operations at Kwajalein on March 8. They made frequent periodic blood counts, urinalyses and other observations. This unit returned to the U. S. from Kwajalein early this month when it became evident that all exposed natives and U. S. personnel would recover without serious consequences. The 28 Americans who were exposed on Rongerik Island were kept under medical observation at Kwajalein by the medical unit. These men were moved to Tripler Army Hospital at Honolulu early this month where they received thorough medical examinations. They have been returned to the U. S. to duty with their parent organizations.

"In April a survey party consisting of representatives from JTF Seven, CINCPACFLT, HICOMTERFACIS, the AEC Engineer Contractors (Holmes & Narver) and the native magistrates of Rongelap and Utrik visited these two Atolls to determine when natives might return and what actions must be taken prior to their return.

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Louis L. Strauss, Chairman
K. B. Nichols, General Manager

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May 27, 1954

"As a result of this survey and recommendations of High Commissioner the following actions will be taken:

- A. Within the next ten days 154 natives of Uterik will be returned to their homes and they will be furnished adequate water and food supplies. Since the native homes were not damaged and since the radioactivity levels are extremely low it is possible to reestablish Uterik natives in their homes at this time.
- B. The radioactivity level at Rongelap, while low, will not permit return of natives at this time. This contamination will decay and will be down to acceptable levels by May 1955. In order that the 62 Rongelap natives may be comfortable and properly cared for while they await return to their homes the AEC contractor (Holmes & Narver) are constructing on IJIF Island of Majuro Atoll a new village of wood and aluminum dwellings and other buildings. This construction will be financed by JTF SEVEN. The Rongelap natives will be moved from Kwajalein to their new homes at Majuro when this construction is finished early in June.
- C. The AEC will continue to monitor the medical conditions of the exposed natives.

In addition the AEC and other agencies will periodically visit the natives and the two home atolls. The Rongelap natives will be returned to their homes as soon as possible and they will be furnished, as in the case of the Uterik natives, water and food supplies."

The Department of State has been notified of and has no objection to the visit. We understand State has informed the U. S. delegation at the U.N.

State and Interior believe it would be useful for the U. S. delegation to report to the Trusteeship Council that the Marshallese are being moved. Gerard Smith's office has requested a draft report which is being prepared by the AEC staff and will be submitted for policy judgment before being provided to State.

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