

WASHINGTON

President Robert Gordon Sproul
University of California
Berkeley 4, California

2 June 1947

My dear President Sproul:

The Navy Department, in cooperation with the War Department and the Atomic Energy Commission, is preparing to send an expedition to Bikini Atoll in the near future to investigate any possible long term effects of the atom bomb explosions conducted last summer on the organisms, the reefs or the islands of the Atoll. Scientists of the U. S. Geological Survey, the Fish and Wild Life Service, the National Museum, the University of Washington, Stanford University, and the Scripps Institution of Oceanography will participate in the expedition. It is hoped to carry out a thoroughgoing investigation of several aspects of the biology and geology of this interesting and little known region. It is planned that the expedition will leave San Diego about the first of July and will be at Bikini for six weeks starting 15 July.

Radiological measurements made a few weeks after the underwater burst last summer showed that very large amounts of radioactive materials has been accumulated by marine plants growing on the reef. These plants form the basic food supply for the fish and marine invertebrates of the atoll; these animals also were found to be heavily contaminated. Available evidence suggests that considerable amounts of radioactive materials are still present. Presumably, sufficient time has now elapsed to bring about at least partial conditions of equilibrium which may make possible quantitative studies of the processes involved in transfer and accumulation of radioactive substances from water and sediment to the plants and hence to the animals. Such studies may be of great importance in future planning for atomic defense. Moreover, the unusual physiology and environmental conditions of both the land and the marine plants of the atoll, combined with the presence of radioactive tracer substances in relatively large amounts, may make possible a unique contribution to basic problems of plant nutrition.

In order to insure the attainment of these important objectives radiochemical investigations must be undertaken under the leadership of scientists competent to deal both with the chemistry of radioactive fission products and with problems of plant nutrition and soil chemistry. Discussions with leaders in these various fields have shown that such a combination of scientific abilities is very rare. From these discussions it is evident that the outstanding specialists in problems of this type are Drs. H. L. Overstreet and Louis Jacobson of the College of Agriculture of the University of California. Dr. Overstreet participated in last summer's tests at Bikini and contributed results of major importance.

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In view of these circumstances I am therefore presuming to request on behalf of the Navy Department that you authorize Professors Overstreet and Jacobson to participate in this summer's expedition to Bikini as leaders of the radio-chemical group of the project. I realize that such participation may involve considerable personal inconvenience to these scientists and also may delay other valuable work planned by the University, but I respectfully urge that the importance of the work at Bikini, both to basic science and to problems of national defense, justify a diversion of the time and energies of Professors Overstreet and Jacobson during the coming three months.

Sincerely yours,

/s/ James Forrestal

cc: Dean Hutchinson
College of Agriculture
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Mr. David Lilienthal
Chairman, Atomic Energy Commission
Washington, D. C.

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