

Office Memorandum • UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

TO : Files

DATE: April 10, 1952

FROM : John C. Bagher, M.D., Deputy Director
Division of Biology and Medicine

SUBJECT: RETURN OF NATIVES TO BIKINI

SYNOPSIS: RD: 100

JCB

Conference in Mr. Kelehan's office on April 9 at 2 p.m.

Attending: Mr. Kelehan, Mr. Scallerup, Colonel Sturges, Dr. Bagher

The following discussion was held under the indicated sub-heads:

1. Ownership of Bikini Atoll:

This Atoll is part of the Marshall Islands held by the United States under a mandate from the United Nations. The entire Pacific Area is called a Trust Territory and is presently administered by the Department of Interior. Prior to World War II, these Islands were held and occupied by Japan under a mandate from the League of Nations. They were German prior to World War I. Review shows that the legal title has never been defined, and they are best considered as the property of their native inhabitants, held in trust by the United States. It seems clear, however, that actual possession of any such atoll seems to be the determining fact.

2. Health Hazards at Bikini:

I reviewed the work done by Dr. Donaldson which indicates that there is some residual fission product activity in the fish and in some places in the marine plant life. About the Island of Bikini itself, this has a low level although it is perceptibly higher than at a point 300 miles to the east. I felt, and so expressed, that the health hazard here is essentially negligible in comparison with the other problems that exist, and that Biology and Medicine would see no reason why these people should not be returned as far as the hazards from persistent radioactivity may be concerned.

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3. Value as a Test Facility:

Colonel Sturges said that it is their opinion, resulting from a conversation on this matter with Dr. Graves, that Bikini should be held as a Number Two test site. It is possible that the tests planned for Eniwetok may result in the destruction of a part or all of the atoll. The strength of these coral atolls is of a low order and they represent a pinnacle of coral erected on the top of a submerged mountain so that the visible portion of the atoll tends to overhang the main mass which is at great depth. A severe shock may therefore cause the crushing of the entire structure. In such case there would be no other test site feasible in the entire area other than Bikini.

4. Treatment of People in Comparison with those Removed from Eniwetok:

The evacuees from Eniwetok were moved to a similar atoll with a good lagoon, and they are reported as being entirely satisfied with the move and quite happy with the result. In contrast, the people from Bikini were moved by the Navy to the Island of Kili, which is subject to the surf around its entire circumference and is not a part of an atoll. The people have been unhappy, and are ill-adapted to survival on an island of this character. It would seem reasonable that if Bikini is to be held as a reserve test site, these people should be moved to an atoll which will offer them the facilities they need to live happily, and thus have treatment comparable to that given by the AEC to the natives of Eniwetok.

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