

Utirik Elementary School and the AEC

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Our concern with the Atomic Energy Commission structures here on Utirik centers around securing decent school facilities for the Community. As of now under verbal agreement with present landowner and seemingly authorized caretaker Lomor Jorout, we are using four buildings in the complex for our school plant (three complete structures and the 35 foot generator house.) As is plainly evident it is kept clean and well taken care of by the 85 pupils, five teachers and the local P.T.A.. The progress so far is yet superficial for the Utirik Community as the buildings still seem in an inadequate status.

We began inquiries to determine their final disposal in March, 1967, at a dinner party in Majuro at the home of Chester Kainuma in a discussion with Dr. Robert Conrad and the business manager, Mr. Rasmussen. We inquired then as to what their feelings would be towards the use of these buildings for elementary school and they gave their verbal agreement. After talking with them, we proceeded to converse with the Listad's office and secure permission as well as inform them of our plans. In conferences with Dwight Heine and his assistant Ray McKay very little knowledge as to AEC plans was available but they said, however, that they would make inquiries and at that time, as far as they were concerned, community use of the structures was fine.

When we finally arrived on Utirik on April 10, 1967, we met and spoke with Lomor Jorout on whose land the buildings are situated and who, by contract, we found out later, is the technical caretaker. We did not start negotiations with him until after a May 25 radio conference with Ray McKay who informed us on that date that:

1. Negotiations are going on presently between Saipan and Atomic Energy Commission but no answer as of yet.
2. If AEC does not want the houses which is likely, they will be returned to the landowner with rental through July 30, 1967.
3. McKay gave us Distad permission to start negotiations with Mor Jorout about school use of the buildings.

Going on the information from that conference we began discussions with Lomor about the possibility. At best, he is a difficult man to deal with and unsure of his position concerning the buildings and the land. This is probably a result of the language barrier and the fact that he has never seen a translation of the agreement nor has a copy of the lease. His negative attitude towards the idea, we believe, also stems from his well known poor social relations with the community and general intolerance of children. We finally secured verbal approval after some tedious discussion by late July, 1967.

At this time also we undertook a school building and renovation program sponsored by Peace Corps Washington on behalf of the Utirik Council. We did this with the hope of finally securing at least some of the structures and renovating them for school use. This program offers the maximum amount of \$1,000 donated by an American elementary or high school for a 25 % or \$250 community deposit. The criteria to qualify for the program are as follows:

1. Suitable land and clear title available.
2. Solid construction plans.
3. Community must provide 25% of the return.
4. There will be no pay for labor provided--materials only.
5. The foundation of a new building must be installed prior to release of funds or approval.
6. A stable political and social structure must exist.
7. The Community must be willing to inform the U.S. sponsors how the money was spent and progress on the school.
8. No obligation exists between the schools when the construction is completed.

As is evident the outstanding criterion and the only one not yet completed by the Community is the first one, that of a clear land title and base to work from. Before we undertook this program, the details of which were passed over radio WSCO Majuro, the Trust Territory radio network, the automatic started on the radio generator broke down (June 7, 1967) and the loss of two-way contact with Majuro slowed down information considerably until August 23, 1967, when the generator was fixed during a regular field-trip stop. On August 28, we had a conference with Assistant District Robert Law concerning the buildings and land title; he passed to us the following information at that time:

1. As of July, 1967, AEC negotiated a renewal of the present lease with the High Commission's office for the Utirik complex.
2. The Health Team needs three buildings for periodic inspection and will continue to hold the title.
3. We should contact Saipan to obtain written permission for school use. Robert Law at that time said he would draft a formal letter to the High Commissioner from District Marshall for the AEC during the following week.
4. The landowner needs written permission himself from AEC before he can part with the acre under and around the complex either by sale (\$500 per acre according to standard Trust Territory outer island price) or donation.

On Utirik itself the job cleaning up had begun daily during the last days of August. In a concerted three-week drive the teachers and students of Utirik Elementary School cleaned the debris and underbrush from around the buildings and scrubbed down the insides of the buildings with coconut husks, sand and seawater. During the last week before the 1967-1968 school year opened on September 18, the local PTA joined in and parents, teachers, and children alike hand gathered and carried coral rock from the lagoon to fill in the grounds.

During Volunteer Jim Clark's trip to Majuro in the months of September and October of 1967 to secure school supplies such as desks, chairs, blackboards, etc. for the school, he made inquiries again with Community Development as to information concerning final AEC disposal beyond present contract terms. In reply we received the following dispatch from Bill Vandling concerning the present status and future legality of any transaction:

RT. DTG. 25 2204 GMT
DISTAD MARSHALLS to COMSAT UTIRIK
CK 02

Re AEC buildings. The following is a quote from present agreement with the Trust Territory and owners. Quote: when not in use by government the owner shall be permitted to use buildings on the premises provided that owner shall not damage buildings or installations nor shall they used for the purpose of storing copra, nor housing livestock. Unquote. We're involved here Batlupke on Utirik. Please check with landowner and get OK for use. Advise us.

Vandling sends.

In response to this we forwarded the following dispatch:

RT DTG. 27 0405 GMT
COMSTA UTIRIK to DISTAD MARSHALLS
INFO PEACE CORPS

Unclass. Pass to vandling. Four AEC structures now in use by Utirik Elementary School. After verbal permission by owner on Batlupke as of September 18, 1967.

McAvoy sends.

This made plain to us the landowner's duties for his part of the lease but we wonder yet if he is as clearly aware of them himself. As far as we can determine, no translation or copy of the lease rests in his hands. The Iroij or chief Namu Hermios (with power of attorney for his mother R. Limojwe who officially holds title over this island according to custom) has backed our plans from his part as a signee of the lease and is due to come

North on a field trip in the near future to converse with the landowner about turning the acre of land of the complex over to the community for use. The Marshall Islands Education Department can be of no help in this matter as they are legally prevented from dealing in land so that the land question finally may rest on the decision of these two men. Namu Hermios will be most interested in talking to Dr. Conard or any other official in the present health team who could discuss and clear up with him future Commission plans for the structures while in Majuro.

In view of the support and possible clearance of the buildings, the faculty in October, 1967, drafted a grant-in-aid proposal to secure funds for a 5 kilowatt generator engine by which to light the completely wired buildings, the wiring being in near perfect condition from the 1958 Air Force-AEC stay. This is coordinated with the future renovation plans and would make the complex the best school plant today in the Marshall Islands. This proposal, endorsed by the entire Utirik community, has received complete approval on the district level, was passed by the Trust Territory Community Development review board in Saipan and is now on Mr. Greenwood's desk waiting for the final approval. Both this and the school partnership program are focused around use of the buildings and hinge on their clearance. A detail of these reports accompanies this report.

Concerning the final plans for disposal of the Utirik buildings, we would like to find out at your earliest convenience if you could be of any help now. The landowner Lomor Jorout is negative on community take-over or extended use but has no definite plans as yet to his personal use in the event that they are released to him.

Presently he was living in the northern most facility facing the pathway. He had previously let the complex fall into a negligent state with human and animal feces and urine throughout many of the rooms. He has recently cleaned and moved out of his own building and the damaged former dispensary building nearest to the lagoon. Whatever his intentions are for this complex, they are certainly neither productive nor for community benefit. It would seem wasteful to allow excellent aluminum structures such as these to stand empty and perhaps be dismantled in turning them over to him. Perhaps a written arrangement could be made whereby the Commission could turn over the complex to the community in conjunction with Iroi Namu's releasing of the land or negotiate a new contract with the Trust Territory and the Iroi himself. A written agreement for continued community use now until new steps could be taken in contract change or renewal. All is riding on the final AEC decision; Utirik Atoll will either have or have not a worthwhile school plant worthy of the name.