

Atomic Age's First Displaced People Lose Leader

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JUDA

By HILL WILLIAMS
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Juda, the elected chief of Bikini, has died without realizing his ambition to take his people back to the home they gave up for American atomic tests in 1946.

The death was a poignant footnote to a long and frustrating campaign to return the atomic age's first displaced people to their ancestral home, a campaign that has been getting much of its push in the Puget Sound area.

An American Peace Corpsman in the Marshall Islands wrote Seattle friends that Juda, 64, died of cancer May 4 on the island of Kili, present home of the Bikini people.

THE DEATH brought back vivid memories to a few Seattle scientists who have studied radioactivity in Bikini for more than 10 years—and in recent years have worked to get the Bikini people back home.

Dr. Lauren R. Donaldson, professor of fisheries at the University of Washington, remembers Juda as a "quiet, almost timid man" who sat on a beach in 1947 and discussed his tribe's problems.

Donaldson met Juda on Rongerik Atoll, the first home of the Bikini people. They left their own island of Bikini in 1946.

Donaldson was very concerned for his people," Donaldson said. "Rongerik had been found to be too small to support them. They were

hardship has been ever since. There is a shortage at

of Everett, who visited the Marshall Islands last year, was touched by the hardship of tribes displaced by American atomic testing.

Meeds has been chipping away at government lethargy in an attempt to help what he considers "the forgotten people of the atomic age."

The United States administers the Marshall Islands, and other Pacific areas, under a United Nations trust.

JUDA's death raises the question again of whether the Bikini people really knew what they were agreeing to when they gave up their home.

It was reported at the time that tribal leaders agreed to give up their home because they were convinced that the tests would benefit the people of the world.

But Dr. Leonard Mason, professor of anthropology at the University of Hawaii, said the important decision was made by Juda and his 10 subchiefs after a very short discussion—perhaps an hour.

"Juda was a forceful man," Mason said. "There would have been no great argument."

Mason believes the Bikini people considered the move a temporary one, that they would return before long.

"And I think the same idea was in the minds of the military men who represented the United States," Mason said. "At that time no one suspected what would happen in the second test."

The second test was the one detonated underwater in the lagoon. The military assumed tidal action would flush radioactivity out of the lagoon fairly quickly.

Instead, plant and animal

life in the lagoon took up the radioactive material and retained it. University of Washington scientists did much of the biological research that finally provided the answer as to what was happening.

IN ADDITION, Mason said, it was an entirely new experience for the Bikini people to have military men ask their opinion on anything. It had never happened during the 30 years of Japanese rule.

"It seems to me that the Bikini people's decision was voluntary but with the understanding, not expressed by either side, that the move was temporary, maybe for a year," Mason said.

"Under these conditions, the decision is not surprising."

Jack Tobin, a Trust Territory anthropologist in the Marshall Islands, said that considering the importance of ancestral land to the Bikini people, "I think it's unlikely they would have left if they knew they could never return."

"I think it was a case of an unsophisticated people being asked something they didn't understand," Tobin said.

Bikini is an atoll with a protected lagoon for fishing. Kili is an isolated island. A reef with heavy surf surrounds the island, making boat launching difficult.

Todd Jenkins, a Peace Corpsman from New Jersey, who has been on Kili almost a year, says winds prevent fishing from November to March. This makes the inhabitants dependent on outside sources for protein.

But supply ships also have trouble getting small boats

Bikini Chief Dies; No 'Homecoming'

through the surf around Kili. And disease has hit the island's breadfruit trees. As a result, Jenkins says, "the food situation is bleak."

TWO YEARS AGO, the Bikinians' hopes of returning to Bikini were raised.

William R. Norwood, then Trust Territory high commissioner, wrote Juda that the A. E. C. had found Bikini "ready for human habitation once again" and that the people probably would be getting home "in the not too distant future."

Nothing happened. It turned out that the A. E. C. was not ready to guarantee the island as safe for human habitation after all.

Needs asked the Interior Department, which administers the Trust Territory, why Norwood had prematurely raised the Bikinians' hopes.

Harry R. Anderson, assistant secretary of the interior, answered: "In retrospect it is obvious that the letter is far more optimistic in tone than it should have been."

However, Anderson added that the Interior Department is developing a program that—if the government OK's a return to Bikini—would restore the atoll so that people could be returned within "the next few years."

An A. E. C. study team, headed by Dr. Edward E. Hold of the University of Washington, visited Bikini last year. The team's findings indicate that radioactivity is low enough that people

could live there safely.

An A. E. C. advisory panel received this and other information a couple of months ago. There has been no decision.

EVEN IF the A. E. C. finds the atoll safe, the Defense Department, which has jurisdiction over it, would have to release it before a rehabilitation program could begin.

Bikini would require rehabilitation before it could again support a human population. Donaldson, Held and other university scientists who have studied the atoll would like to see the rehabilitation begin now so that it would be ready when and if the people's return is approved.

Coconut trees, killed in testing, would be replanted and test debris cleared away.

Some officials fear continued problems with the uprooted Bikinian people even if they are allowed to return home.

Design to be administrator of the Marsh Islands district in which the people now live, said:

"The children haven't seen Bikini, but their parents talk of it as their wonderful home. I'm afraid that if they do go back it won't be the enchanted land they've heard about.

"I'm afraid there will not be an end to their troubles for some time, even if they go back."

Heine is one of the few Marshallese who holds a Trust Territory post.

Jenkins and his wife, Hope, report that Bikinians resist improvement on Kili for fear that better conditions will prompt the United States government to leave them there.

"The people have been very friendly to us," Mrs. Jenkins said. "They made us feel at home. In fact, we feel as though we have no choice but to get involved in their problems."

The Jenkinses are former schoolteachers.

THE DEATH of Juda may mark a turning point in the Bikinians' attitudes.

"Militancy has become noticeable, particularly among the children," Heine said. "Juda was a very patient, reasonable man who kept the tribe alive."

"But I don't know how strong his successors will be."

When Juda was dying, he asked that he be buried on Bikini when his people were allowed to return. Heine promised him the wish would be carried out.

Jenkins, who has written the United Nations about the Bikinian people's problems, said:

"What my wife and I are trying to do is to see that the United States government does not forget these people. It looks to us as if it has."