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To speak more directly to the question that Harry Brown presented yesterday, I am very much opposed to basing a light helicopter aboard our chartered vessel for the January-February medical survey. I have a number of reasons for taking this position, but first I think it would be wise for me to outline my qualifications for making these observations and recommendations.

For 30 years I was a Naval aviator as well as a Naval physician and flight surgeon. For the first 11 years of that period I was solely a Naval aviator and had rather extensive experience with helicopters. During my period of shipboard duty aboard several Forrestal-class carriers, first as a Junior Medical Officer and then as a Senior Medical Officer, it was my responsibility to assure safety of flight, particularly in helicopter areas, both landing on the flight deck of large carriers and in support of surface ships of the size of destroyers. I am thoroughly familiar with the problems associated with light helicopter support of small ships. I have a long list of references of accident reports involving attempts to support light helicopters on small vessels. This is an extremely hazardous operation even under ideal conditions.

The period of the medical survey includes the roughest weather of the year and we can almost guarantee 30-knot winds and rough seas throughout the entire survey. ~~As the survey~~ leader and medical officer in charge of this survey, I will not accept the responsibility for the hazards presented by a helicopter operating off the ship.

A compounding problem which I suggested to Harry and which apparently has not been considered in the past, is the fact that Kwajalein, as a highly restricted military area, has some very stringent rules concerning overflights by private aircraft. There would have to be some very significant modifications of their present security measures to allow any private overflights. Again, I have no advance warning as to when there might be incoming missiles into the Kwajalein test range, and there would have to be constant communication between the ship at sea and the Kwajalein operations center so that a private helicopter didn't stray into an area of incoming missiles.

All of these problems I'm afraid would interfere with the basic mission of this ship which is the support of the DOE Medical Program during this time frame. I would suggest that if Mr. Otterman has potentially pressing business obligations in some other area that he has two options: (1) he can appoint a suitable surrogate to solve those problems for him while he is aboard the ship; or (2) he can make arrangements for a private charter, fixed wing aircraft to pick him up landing in the lagoon of either Utirik or Kwajalein.

As each day unfolds and we come face to face with new and more unusual requests (demands) from Mr. Otterman regarding the details of this charter arrangement, I find myself more and more skeptical about the future renewal of this contract. I assume that the previous administrative arrangements concerning the control of the vessel, schedule, and the disposition of the vessel in port will be as it has been in the past with our previous vessel

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and that the survey leader will have administrative control over those things that do not involve the safety of the ship. I have the impression that Mr. Otterman considers the American Survey to Utirik and Rongelap some sort of a romantic, South Pacific interlude, and my past experience has shown me that he can be quite demanding and unreasonable at times. I would therefore hope that the exact details of the authority and responsibilities for the operations of the Medical Program and the ship be clearly spelled out for Mr. Otterman prior to the time the ship sails for Kwajalein.


I don't want to be hardnosed about this but I think in this case that in dealing with Mr. Otterman it's imperative that we lay all our cards on the table so everybody understands exactly where our mutual responsibilities and authorities are. If I can be of any further assistance, in this matter, please don't hesitate to call or write.

Please give my best to Harry and Wayne. I think they have done a superb job. Each of them is now eligible for the Purple Heart.

Warm regards,

Hugh Pratt, M.D.

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