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AEC 952/45

April 9, 1958

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ATOMIC ENERGY COMMISSION

SPECIAL SHOTS FOR HARDTACK

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Note by the Secretary

The attached letter to the Chairman of the JCAE which reflects the Commission's decision at Meeting 1352 on April 7, 1958, is circulated for the information of the Commission.

W. B. McCool
Secretary

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UNITED STATES
ATOMIC ENERGY COMMISSION
WASHINGTON 25, D.C.

April 8, 1958

Dear Mr. Durham:

Among the shots that we have planned for the HARDTACKED Operation are two very high altitude firings ~~one~~ one at 250,000 feet and the other at 125,000 feet. Both of these firings are of extreme importance to our defense programs. They are expected to give us valuable and essential information with respect to various effects that occur following a nuclear detonation above the greater portion of the earth's atmosphere. It is expected that the results of these tests will prove of great significance in the development of our defensive capabilities including possible defensive measures against intercontinental ballistic missiles.

Since the initial conception of these tests, we have, of course, studied exhaustively the safety aspects of their conduct. One of these aspects concerns the distances to which the visible light from these explosions might cause damage to the human eye. Our first studies indicated that these distances were small enough to be confined to our test area and therefore created no uncontrollable problem with respect to the safe conduct of the two tests.

New theoretical calculations as to the amount of energy from these shots that will appear in the form of visible radiation have increased materially our estimate of the range at which some damage might be caused to the human eye. This increased range includes a number of the inhabited atolls of the Marshall Islands. We have studied ways and means of controlling the conduct of these tests so as to insure that the natives of these islands could under no condition receive eye damage. We have, for instance, considered the stationing of American personnel, including Trust Territory officials, on the various atolls and taking as positive measures as possible to insure that no one was looking directly at the detonation at the time of its occurrence. However, it is felt that, despite an almost unlimited expenditure of our personnel

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resources in this matter, we cannot positively assure that no one would receive such damage. In view of the nature of our responsibility towards these people, we feel that we cannot accept the lack of an absolute assurance in this regard and have therefore decided not to conduct these tests at the Eniwetok Proving Ground.

Due to the extreme importance of these tests to our national security, we have studied the matter of conducting them safely at some other location. The results of preliminary studies indicate that we can conduct these tests most safely at Johnston Island. We are therefore planning, with the concurrence of the Department of Defense, to conduct these tests at Johnston Island as a part of Operation HARDTACK. It is our present objective that these tests will take place prior to or in September of this year.

Sincerely yours,

/s/

W. F. Libby
Acting Chairman

Honorable Carl T. Durham
Chairman, Joint Committee on
Atomic Energy
Congress of the United States

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