

MARSHALL ISLANDS FILE TRACKING DOCUMENT

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May 18, 1954

AEC 125/8

COPY NO. 14

ATOMIC ENERGY COMMISSION

REHABILITATION OF MARSHALL ISLAND INHABITANTS

Note by the Secretary

1. The attached letters from Orme Lewis, Assistant Secretary of the Interior and Frank E. Midkiff, High Commissioner, Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands, are circulated for the information of the Commission.

ROY B. SNAPP  
Secretary

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UNITED STATES  
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY  
WASHINGTON 25, D. C.

May 13, 1954

My dear Mr. Strauss:

I am enclosing a copy of a letter sent by the High Commissioner of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands, Mr. Midkiff, to Mr. Strand, Director of the Office of Territories, concerning the fall out that occurred over certain islands in the Marshall Group as a result of the Atomic Energy Commission's experiment of March 1, 1954.

Mr. Midkiff enumerates in his letter the steps, which he understands as a result of his conversations, will be taken jointly by the Department of Defense and the Atomic Energy Commission to rehabilitate the natives who were affected by the fall out. These measures will, I believe, provide satisfactorily for rehabilitation of the affected inhabitants and I would appreciate your confirmation that the Atomic Energy Commission will see that these steps are carried out. This is particularly important since we will undoubtedly be required to inform the Trusteeship Council of the United Nations in July of the measures that are being taken.

Sincerely yours,

/s/

Department of Energy  
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Orme Lewis

Assistant Secretary of the Interior

Mr. Lewis L. Strauss  
Chairman  
Atomic Energy Commission  
Washington 25, D. C.

Enclosure

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UNITED STATES  
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
OFFICE OF TERRITORIES  
WASHINGTON 25, D. C.

April 27, 1954

Mr. William C. Strand  
Director, Office of Territories  
Washington 25, D. C.

Dear Mr. Strand:

The Atomic Energy Commission's experiment of March 1, 1954, due to an unexpected windshift, resulted in a fall out over the atolls of Rongerik, Rongelap, Utirik, and Ailinginae in the Northern Marshall Island chain. American weather station personnel (the sole inhabitants) were evacuated from Rongerik and the Micronesians found on the atolls were evacuated from Rongelap, Utirik, and Ailinginae.

All were brought by the Navy Task Group of Joint Task Force SEVEN to Kwajalein. There they were housed, fed, and treated by Naval authorities. Most all the natives from Rongelap, and several from Utirik and Ailinginae were affected by gamma and possibly beta radiation. There have been no deaths and it is reported that all seem to be making recoveries and that all are now out of danger. Persons not affected or only very slightly affected have been moved to a tent camp on Ebeye. Mr. Wilds, our Distad-Representative is cooperating with the Joint Task Force and Navy in caring for the natives. It is planned to return the natives to their atolls as soon as medical authorities clear them and the Atomic Energy Commission signifies that the atolls are decontaminated sufficiently to live there. It is probable that there have been heavy rains and this condition would hasten the decontamination process.

Careful checks will be continued by representatives of the Atomic Energy Commission to determine any residual effects resulting from the experiment, including effects on vegetation and animal life.

Rehabilitation of the natives will be accomplished jointly by the Department of Defense and the Atomic Energy Commission in the following manner:

- a. Transportation from the return to their atolls.
- b. Food during the trips and the sojourn on Kwajalein and Ebeye.
- c. Restoration of clothing and livestock.

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d. Gifts of cloth, hand tools, fish lines and hooks, and other useful articles to be selected under the advice of the anthropologists.

e. A supply of food to carry the inhabitants through a period until their own foods are available.

f. Cleansing of their cisterns and replenishing them.

g. Assurance of continued medical checks and follow-ups as needed.

The Atomic Energy Commission is investigating, in conjunction with the Department of Defense, possible means of settling claims which the natives may register as a result of their having been contaminated and removed from their atolls.

In subsequent experiments consideration will be given by the Joint Task Force Commander as to the necessity of evacuating the Micronesians from their homes prior to any shots being detonated.

Dr. John C. Bugher and other officials of the Atomic Energy Commission are checking with the Navy at Cincpac and Kwajalein and with Trust Territory officials. Among other arrangements will be provision for follow-up checks and treatment. The Atomic Energy Commission, if considered advisable, will provide geiger counters to the hospitals of Majuro, Ponape, and Truk to be used in measuring radiation that may occur in fish caught for consumption in the hospital messes. This will be a fair sample of all fish used in the nearby areas. No danger is expected from this source, but the measure is believed to be more of a public relations precaution.

Every effort will be made by the High Commissioner and his staff, working in conjunction with and under the advice of the Atomic Energy Commission, to allay any possible hysteria amongst the Micronesians and retain fully a cooperative attitude amongst them.

It is suggested that the Department of the Interior consider communicating with the Atomic Energy Commission, enclosing a copy of the above memorandum and approving the terms thereof. Reports of all tests that are pertinent to the administration of the Trust Territory should be requested for the information and guidance of the Secretary of the Interior and the High Commissioner of the Trust Territory.

Sincerely yours, Department of Energy  
Historian's Office  
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Frank E. Midkiff  
High Commissioner  
Trust Territory of the  
Pacific Islands