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Norris Bradbury to the Rescue

Roger A. Meade

Millions of dollars were routinely spent on nuclear testing, particularly for test series conducted at the Pacific Proving Ground. Following the Castle-Bravo test of March 1, 1954, however, a small crisis involving only a few hundred dollars created a bureaucratic impasse that could not be resolved until Norris Bradbury interceded.

As a safety precaution, all personnel stationed at the Bikini Atoll workcamp were evacuated prior to Bravo's detonation. Since their evacuation was to be for only a day or two, and because they were being sent to already overcrowded ships, the evacuees were only allowed to take a bare minimum of personal effects, not much more than the clothes on their backs. Bravo destroyed the workcamp, including the personal effects of each worker, leaving those evacuated literally homeless, without even a change of clothes.

No one, not even the Joint Task Force Commander, had the authority to authorize reimbursement for personal losses. The issue was referred to the AEC without success. Norris Bradbury, acting on his own initiative, authorized reimbursement, but only if each affected person submitted a detailed list of lost clothing. By doing so, Bradbury solved what was, perhaps, the most difficult task of the entire Operation.



Work camp before Bravo.



Work camp after Bravo.