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SUBJECT: COMMENTS REGARDING THE USE OF TAONGI ATOLL AS A TEST SITE (u)

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DATE: April 11, 1957



Consideration has been given to the effect that the use of Taongi atoll as a test site may have upon (1) the Japanese tuna fleet, (2) contamination of ocean waters, and (3) bird life.

(1) From the Japanese fishing records for the period from May 1953 to September 1954 there was no fishing in the area about Taongi (160° to 170° E, 13° to 16° N) and little fishing in the Bikini-Eniwetok area. The greatest fishing intensity was a few degrees north of the equator. Fishing boats in transit to the fishing grounds may occasionally pass near Taongi.

(2) Fallout into the ocean from tests at Taongi would be expected to be into the same general part of the North Equatorial system as fallout from the Eniwetok Test Site. The flow of the North Equatorial current at these latitudes is westward, but it is possible that fallout from either test site may temporarily become part of a local eddy system. The likelihood of tunas entering water contaminated by fallout is no greater, and probably less, for Taongi than for the Eniwetok Test Site, as Taongi, being north of Eniwetok, is farther removed from the area in which tuna are most abundant.

(3) There is an enormous number of sea birds at Taongi which the Marshallese, in the past, considered to be a bird reserve. Bikar Atoll and Jemo Island, 150 and 275 miles to the south, respectively, were also bird reserves. From the literature it is known that sooty terns, wedge-tailed shearwaters, and frigate birds are present in great numbers, but it is not known if this atoll is used as the exclusive rookery for any one species. If the amount of guano is an indication, the evidence would indicate that this atoll is not an important rookery, as Fosberg writes "...guano was so scarce it was difficult to get a proper sample for analysis." The information about the birds present throughout the year probably is not available in the literature because, other than the annual visit by the Marshallese and the occupation by the Japanese during World War II, only on a few occasions and for short periods have visitors set foot on the atoll. Parties by Cameron in 1893, Ismer in 1896, and Fosberg in 1952 are the only known white people to have been on Taongi (Pokak Atoll).

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Lt. Col. R. I. Schnittke

- 2 -

April 11, 1957

Conclusion: The use of Taongi as a test site would probably have no greater effect upon the Japanese tuna fleet or contamination of the ocean than the use of Eniwetok-Bikini. A great many birds would be killed at Taongi but there is not sufficient information in the literature to determine if this may mean the extinction of a species.

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