

February 18, 1971

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THRU: W. W. Burr, Deputy Director, DBM 2/18/71

NOTES ON MEETING WITH LT. COL. WILLIAM D. HOWELL, AIR FORCE SURGEON
GENERAL'S OFFICE, FEBRUARY 17, 1971, 10:00 A.M.

Dr. Still and I met with Col. Howell to discuss the status of his efforts in following up the 28 airmen exposed to 78 rads whole body dose on Rongerik following the March 1, 1954 detonation on Bikini. He told us that three men were still in the service and he had had physical examinations carried out on them. About ten men had more or less dropped out of sight as of 1963 or so and would have to be located. The remainder had at some time made "claims" on the Veterans Administration and the VA, therefore, had medical and other records on them; the records were not necessarily current.

Col. Howell clearly was concerned about the Air Force acting responsibly toward these men but felt that there must be a balance between seeing that they got proper medical supervision as against converting them into hypochondriacs, generating claims against the Government, setting precedents, etc.

He expressed interest in cooperating and/or collaborating with Dr. Conard and indicated that he would like to visit Brookhaven when it became convenient. To that end we agreed that I would call Dr. Conard and would then see that he and Dr. Conard became better acquainted by telephone. The idea of this was to withdraw DBM to the sidelines, leaving the principals to work together.

I have sent Col. Howell a copy of my letter to Dr. Conard, dated January 12, 1971, describing the understandings I had arrived at with DASA and the VA, giving special attention to the ethical considerations that might apply to Conard's examination of these people.

Before leaving, Dr. Still and I asked if he had any plans for the larger number of aircraft pilots who flew through clouds of fallout collecting aerial samples. He indicated that he had considered this but had not taken it up because, (a) the doses were small; (b) a pilot who got any kind of a significant dose was given other duties; and (c) there were quite a large number of pilots who had been assigned to other missions. On the whole his response to the pilot exposures added up to a negative.

H. D. Bruner, M.D.
Assistant Director Med. Br. Dep. Dir.
Division of Biology and Medicine
JDGoldstein W. W. Burr
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EM AD Med. Br.
HDBruner ETStill
2/18/71 2/18/71
cc: Dr. Still

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Marshall Island Incident

Twenty-eight U. S. airmen assigned to a weather detachment unit on Rongerik were exposed to radiation subsequent to the March 1, 1954, detonation on Bikini. The best estimate of total gamma dose in air on Rongerik was 78 roentgens. Following the exposure, the men were hospitalized for an approximate eight-week period for observation and subsequently were released to duty.

Since these men incurred their exposure while in service, it is more appropriate for the Air Force Surgeon General, with the assistance of the Veterans Administration, to maintain contact and follow these individuals than for the Atomic Energy Commission to do so. The Air Force Surgeon General is aware of the exposures received by the men and is aware that there may be late sequelae and has initiated an appropriate program for following these individuals.

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