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TRIP REPORT - MAJURO, EBEYE, RONGELAP, UTIRIK

REPOSITORY: DOE/PASO
COLLECTION: DOE/NV
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FOLDER: BNL FOLDER #3
FY 1979
MEDICAL PROGRAM

Background

I was asked to accompany BNL's in-vivo counting and bioassay mission to Rongelap and Utirik to serve as a Program Coordinator and DOE representative and spokesman. Similar missions had been conducted in 1974 and 1977. In addition to the bioassay work, a three person BNL team was sent to repair the wind generators on Rongelap and Utirik which are to take air samples. The ocean going portion of the trip lasted from August 23 through September 4. BNL personnel arrived on Kwajalein several days earlier to set up equipment and count Rongelap and Utirik people living on Ebeye.

The second part of my mission was to work with the Marshall Islands Government and assist them to fulfill their obligation to pay subsistence and transportation claims to those Rongelap and Utirik persons on the Brookhaven Roster who are ill and referred to Majuro or Ebeye for treatment. It was estimated that \$45,000 in unpaid claims were outstanding since 1975 under DOE/TTPI agreement. These problems were due primarily to administrative breakdowns in the TTPI and the cumbersome mechanics originally set up to have the agreement function. These mechanics have been streamlined and assisting the TT administration remained the final task.

Claims

I arrived in Majuro on August 21 and health services officials had prepared a listing of persons claiming about \$38,000. After reviewing list I approved \$33,325.50 as that which DOE would reimburse under our agreement. The MI government, on my request, issued checks in this amount and some \$13,000 was distributed on Majuro on August 22.

The Chief Secretary Oscar DeBrum and President Amata Kabua welcomed this assistance and were most cordial as usual. Mr. Reynold DeBrum was assigned to work with me both as the MI Government representation for claims related work and to otherwise assist our entire mission.

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I requested and was given by the MI Government some \$20,000 in currency to take with us to Rongelap and Utirik to pay off the remaining claims from the Majuro listing. A special point was made that these claims were being paid by the MI Government. DOE's role was only to reimburse them for covered expenditures.

In addition I designed a form for use by the MI Government which would be acceptable to us to reimburse them for claims under the new agreement DE-AI08-79EV10017. The new agreement was explained and I believe there was genuine understanding by the health and finance officials as to how it should and will work so as to enable payment to claimants when they need it (as soon as they arrive Majuro or Ebeye). The government also translated the agreement into Marshallese at my request so I could distribute it on Rongelap and Utirik.

Letters of credit (\$45,000 Majuro, \$15,000 Ebeye) preceded me and were used to reimburse the MI Government "on the spot".

Announcements were put on the air as to the reasons for and dates of the WBC and claims payment trip. I also had announced BNL's medical schedule along with their program goals and that persons on BNL roster who wished to be examined and who lived on outer islands other than Rongelap and Utirik would have their expenses paid by BNL were to come to Majuro or Ebeye to meet with the BNL medical team schedule. This seemed desirable because it provided covered people an exam opportunity and would be less costly than sending the team to see one or two people on another outer island.

On August 23 Reynold DeBrum and I went to Ebeye and went through the same process with excellent results. \$4,050.00 was paid and procedures were set up to begin payments under the new agreement.

During our trip to Rongelap and Utirik the remaining funds were disbursed, the new agreement was explained. Any person who felt they had an unpaid claim or other claim problem was listened to individually and given the assurance that their problem would be checked out by the MI Government.

Summary of claims situation related to DOE/TTPI agreements:

1. \$37,375.50 was paid out by the MI Government, reimbursed by DOE. This was most welcome, of course, by the affected people and by MI Government officials who were feeling pressure by claimants.
2. A much better understanding of what the past and present agreements provide was imparted to both MI administrative officials, members of the Nitijela (MI Legislature) and people directly affected.

3. Simple workable procedures were set up both in Majuro and Ebeye to process and pay claims under the new agreement (since October 1, 1978). In just three days, the Ebeye Government had already paid several claims.
4. A system of reimbursing the MI Government for those few remaining claims prior to October 1, 1978 was set up and a deadline of December 31, 1979 was set as the last day PASO would accept invoices for those old claims.
5. The MI Government seems very comfortable with these arrangements and I believe the DOE/TTPI/Marshalls Government/Rongelap-Utirik people relationship has been enhanced.
6. The people of both atolls and their Nitijela representatives resent that the agreements have been made without input from them and they want to be a party to subsequent agreements. Reynold and I promised to convey the desire to the High Commissioner and Chief Secretary.

Whole Body Counting

Prior to sailing for Rongelap, I met with the BNL personnel to review their mission plans and to review the various protocols necessary to conducting the mission. They were also briefed on the capabilities of the vessel, the composition of the crew, the H&N contract with U.S. Oceanography and some of the problems we faced on island. The meeting was excellent and many potential problems were eliminated.

We sailed at 9:30a on Saturday, August 21. The ship and equipment were very well organized. Arrived Rongelap 7:00a Monday, August 23 (TT time) and met with the new Magistrate Jabwe. Their radio had been "broken" for a month but we were expected because they heard my announcement over the broadcast station. Reynold DeBrum introduced as Chief Secretary Representative and sent also by Chief Secretary to assist DOE/BNL in their work. The usual opening meeting was held with about 23 persons in attendance. It was cordial and permission was secured to repair wind generators, collect few food samples and begin WBC. 25 persons were counted that day and claims were paid. The magistrate and people were very cooperative and seemed to welcome the WBC program which was carefully explained at the opening meeting.

It was interesting to note that the person BNL brought to begin work on long range diet studies for selected persons eating food from selected locations was not aware of the sampling done on the 13 atoll survey. Perhaps they don't interrelate but I suggest this reinforces the need for more coordination between principal investigators.

Due in part to the long hours worked by all BNL people and because the WBC sampling fell short due to many people being off island, it became evident that we would finish ahead of schedule. 43 persons were counted on Tuesday.

On Wednesday the counting continued and the wind generator work was close to complete.

On Thursday, the remaining work was completed and a large island wide social event took place, with movies and a chicken barbeque. This was sponsored by BNL, DOE and the Liktanur crew who did a great job of cooking and serving the food. A generator was brought on shore to run the movies and provide lights. The evening was memorable in that personal relationships were strengthened and we felt more as partners in a cooperative effort rather than outsiders who were not very welcome.

On Friday, the remaining urine samples were gathered, a close out meeting held and we set sail for Utirik about 11:00a.

The same scenario prevailed on Utirik. We were met by Acting Magistrate Harris Joel who had not expected us that early. Nevertheless, the opening meeting afforded permission to conduct our work. Obviously the most interest was generated by the promise of claims payment and the explanation of the new agreement.

Work went extremely well on Utirik and BNL counted over 40 persons per day per full day on station. The food sample gathering took somewhat less than one day at each location and the wind generator people utilized all time available on station.

Reynold DeBrum's careful translations, his rapport, respect for and from the people of the islands and the mission team, in my opinion, immensely enhanced DOE missions both instant and future. His ability opened curtains that were closed in the past.

A problem arose on Utirik whereby former Magistrate Masa Attari kept requesting items from us such as fuel. Our policy whereby Government owned goods cannot be sold, given or traded for the benefit of any individual was carefully reviewed with the mission personnel and crew members. Mr. Attari has received due recognition in connection with previous missions to Utirik both on the Liktanur and the Wheeling.

Dr. Pratt has been made aware of Mr. Attari's boasts on the number of referrals he has had and will get in the future for his back problem.

Gift food to the community or several gallons of diesel fuel or gas for the community boat or radio generator are accepted goodwill gestures that would be exceptions to use of Government property.

By Tuesday morning all counting was concluded, samples collected and stored and a very moving closing meeting was held. People were assured at both atolls that their radiation levels continued to decrease substantially and there was no known danger to them from radiation from the food and water they drank, the air they breathed or the land they lived on. We left for Kwajalein about 10:30a on September 4.

The party held the night before we left was one of the nicest I have attended. Movies preceded the dinner (all 277 persons on the atoll attended I'm sure), and following that there were traditional dances performed by the islanders and some not so traditional reciprocal disco steps by mission members.

With the single exception mentioned previously the entire team worked with and socially enjoyed the people of Utirik as friends. As with Rongelap, the claims payments did nothing to damage this friendship.

It is time to note that at no time were we able to communicate between the vessel and Kwajalein. This unacceptable situation was discussed with Kentron upon our return and agreements were reached to alter frequencies to insure this is not repeated.

Upon our return to Kwajalein Reynold and I immediately went to Ebeye by whaler to check on the possibility of more claims surfacing. We met with Jetan Anjain, Nitijela representative of the Rongelap people. He is or was a dental officer with the TTPI and is very articulate and vocal. He was angry that his people had no input into the new medical referral subsistence agreement. I advised him that his government, both TT and Marshalls, had plenty of time for input but did not do so and that this was really an internal problem. I told him also that while we might not always agree to what he wanted, that we should keep an open dialogue as friends who share a common objective. I believe this was a productive meeting for both his government and ours. We then met with the Utirik Nitijela representative, Donald Matthew, on Kwajalein. He seemed satisfied with our efforts.

In conclusion and before the recommendations I would like to acknowledge the professional manner in which Bob Miltenberger, Ed Lessard, Allen Hunt, Joe Balsamo, Bob Sherwin, Bob Dillingham and Jerry Rademacher carried out this mission. They worked long hours, rushed through or skipped several meals to continue their work and helped create a general atmosphere of goodwill.

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In addition, the owner, captain and crew of the Liktanur II performed superbly in every area. The work they did with showing movies, making friends with the islanders and especially in planning cooking and serving food and beverage for the island wide parties far exceeded their usual duties and involved long hours.

Finally, the work of Reynold DeBrum helped us to bring this mission back to Kwajalein successfully, a full two days ahead of what was thought originally to be a restrictive time allotment. He learned the various programmatic requirements quickly and performed claims work. He translated at significant meetings, and worked aboard ship taking histories for BNL. He represented his government well as the Chief Secretary's personal representative and was instrumental in explaining policy and smoothing out individual misunderstandings. He is well known and respected by people all over the Marshall Islands as I witnessed first hand on the Northern Marshalls Survey on the Wheeling, on the WBC to Kili and Jaluit and this recent trip.

Recommendations

1. Reynold DeBrum be recruited as a DOE Coordinator and be based in Majuro. He is about 45 years of age, educated at Xavier HS in Truk (Jesuit run) and a ranking employee in the Marshall Department of Resources and Development. He is from Likiep Atoll and has previously served DOE on the Northern Marshalls 13 atoll survey, the May 1979 WBC mission to Kili-Jaluit and this trip to Rongelap and Utirik. He is mature, and has an open mind on radiation related problems. He is respected and liked by the Marshallese people and by Americans who have worked with him. Mr. DeBrum might well be carried as an H&N employee to perform these tasks.

Proposed Duties

- a. Make all logistics arrangements for medical/WBC or other DOE missions to Majuro.
- b. Arrange for meetings as required.
- c. Serve as translator/program assistant as required.
- d. Serve as focal point for questions and answers raised by people regarding DOE programs.
- e. Travel as DOE representative/translator with medical and environmental teams to Rongelap, Utirik Likiep, etc. as required.

- f. Serve as one point of interface with Marshall Islands Government personnel.
 - g. Monitor all claims under DOE/TTPI medical referral subsistence agreement, and insure prompt resolution of claims problems.
2. A DOE representative may not be needed on every trip to Rongelap and Utirik especially if there is no shift in policy or the department has nothing new to convey to the people. This should be decided on a case by case basis before each trip.
 3. Exceptions should not be made by DOE/BNL regarding treatment of people who are not on the BNL roster. This, of course, is not meant to apply to those persons treated on island by BNL or to the referral function of anyone sick enough to warrant being sent to Majuro or Ebeye facilities. The recommendation is made because for every exception the question can legitimately be raised by anyone that if exceptions are made for several people why shouldn't they be made for any sick person who needs to be treated outside the Marshalls. The Secretary of Health Services in the Marshalls expressed his displeasure that BNL referral had made arrangements at Children's Hospital in Honolulu for a boy with an orthopedic problem in his elbow. His point was that the Marshalls Government was forced into paying the transportation and medical costs for a patient not cleared through his medical referral committee in Majuro. Limited referral funds are used on a selective basis by this committee, at least in theory.

Original Signed By

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