



Department of Energy

Honolulu, HI 96820-2339

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TO: Frank Hawkins, Director, Office of International Health Programs (EH-63)

REPORT OF FIELD TRIP TO MARSHALL ISLANDS

I. Background

I typically serve as the DOE's representative on the principal portions of the medical mission. Although it had been my intent to do so in connection with the Spring, 1997 medical mission, events transpired which limited my direct involvement in the mission. I was instead involved in supporting orientation trips and in participating in special meetings in the Marshall Islands on behalf of EH.

II. Dates

April 28-29	Kwajalein
April 30-May 10	Majuro
May 10-11	Kwajalein
May 11- 14	Bikini
May 14	Kwajalein

III. Activities and Observations

I was very pleased with the progress of the medical mission which was nearly half-way completed by the time I reached Kwajalein. Dr. Ashok Vaswani had conducted the first portion of the mission, and by all indications, had done an outstanding job. He had worked strenuously to better organize his medical team, to update and improve patient-scheduling, as well as the computer record-keeping, and in creating harmonious staff working relationships and in achieving good rapport with the patients. Indeed, it was reported to me that the patients were very satisfied with the mission and their stay at Kwajalein, and somewhat concerned about negative rumors they were reading and hearing about BNL.

The mission was very hectic and busy, yet, as customary, there were lulls in the activities which resulted in unproductive "stand-around" time for the doctors, as well as prolonged waiting periods for some of the patients. We continue to make modest improvements in the patient scheduling, mostly by dint of the log support contractor's aggressive involvement in moving the BNL's system along; still, we have a ways to go. We were surprised by the large, expensive and unplanned for drug orders made by the first half's OB/GYN specialist. BN responded to the doctor's request but clearly better medical coordination is required at the front end of the mission so that the contractor is not taken by surprise. We were also puzzled why the large orders for items such as estrogen and progesterone.

We received excellent support from USAKA, especially the hospital and staff, for the mission. Arrangements at Kwajalein proved to be sound. Also, the accommodations and shopping privileges for patients worked out well this mission. We had no real complaints to speak of. Final figures show that BNL examined 153 patients, 115 of which were complete and full exams; the remainder (38) were follow-ups. There were also 99 recalls of the 153 patients while they were on island at Kwajalein. Patients were brought to Kwajalein from a number of islands, including Utrik, Mejatto, Majuro, Ailinglaplap, Mejit, and, of course, Ebeye.

There were only three patients designated for referral to Honolulu for further treatment and evaluation. Doctors' home visits were also made to patients at Ebeye, Majuro, Utrik, Mejatto, and DOE facilitated the visit of the 177 Health Care team to Mejatto during the mission.

It was a great pleasure to work with Dr. Ashok Vaswani during the mission. He is a caring, sensitive individual with a great ability to empathize with the patients, as well as being managerially astute. It was also good to have Dr. Howard for the second half of the mission. She was particularly helpful and cooperative.

As mentioned, I was heavily engaged in providing support to others during the trip. After a brief visit to Kwajalein, I travelled to Majuro as planned, to join up with Dr. Robert Crease of SUNY. Dr. Crease is a Scientific Historian that had been contracted by BNL to write a history of the laboratory. Crease was in the RMI to conduct interviews and assemble information about the Marshall Islands program over the years, all being accomplished quite independently of anything we may have read about BNL and its MI program in recent weeks. I must admit that I was very favorably impressed by Dr. Crease, and his detailed knowledge of the program. He had obviously done his "homework". I briefed him and arranged interviews of Marshallese "old-timers" like Oscar de Brum, Kosang Mizutani, Sebio Shoniber, etc. who had early (as well as recent) involvement in the BNL medical program.

A team of DOE/NV staff, led by Deputy Manager, Terry Vaeth, arrived in Majuro to meet with the Bikini Council as well as with the Rongelap leadership. Mr. Vaeth offered the services of his Environmental Management (EM) group to assist those communities in their resettlement and clean-up efforts. As requested, I attended those meetings and/or facilitated the discussions. Apparently, DOE/NV has built up a body of knowledge as well as state-of-the-art techniques in nuclear clean-up and restoration work and it wishes to help the Marshallese in these areas. The Bikinians, though interested, were somewhat more deliberative and non-committal in response to the offer; the Rongelapese seem keenly interested and wish to meet again soon with Mr. Vaeth in Nevada to observe field activities and results. (That will take place in early July).

Mr. Jon Weisgall's (the Bikinian attorney who chaired the initial Vaeth-Bikinian meeting) opening pitch was that the present MI program (of EH) is geared principally to medical work and doesn't focus on clean-up per se, whereas the DOE/NV and its EM effort lends itself very well to environmental restoration. Given application of present resettlement/clean-up funds, or the acquisition of new, clean-up funds from the USC, the communities, with DOE/NV's help, could get on with clean-up work right now, stated Weisgall. Thus, he will work on obtaining supplemental funding for the clean-up activity through Sen. Harry Reid's (Nevada) office, and the

Rongelap lawyer, Howard Hills, will be invited to join in this effort. In the meantime, if the communities wish to proceed, Mr. Vaeth can begin offering the gratis services of his EM federalists to start the planning and community processes. My role was to not only facilitate the meetings and discussions, but to make clear it was understood by both the communities that Mr. Vaeth's initiative was strictly DOE/NV's. That it should not be associated with the present MI program of the department and EH's role: our activity was focussed on medical and environmental & radiological analysis and characterizations, etc. so as to aid their resettlement decision-making.

I also met with Jack Niedenthal, the Bikini Trust Liaison officer. My principal interest was to arrange for Mayor Juda to meet with DAS Seligman and Judge when they were to be in Majuro, so as to review and resolve our current problems with the Bikini Council. He promised to arrange such a meeting.

I spent time with and assisted Dr. Ashok Vaswani during his visit to Majuro to conduct home examinations of the confined patients. Among other things, I arranged for him to inspect a building that has been offered by RRE to us for rent, to determine if in the future, if we had such a requirement, whether it would be useful to BNL. Dr. Vaswani felt the facility offered distinct possibilities. I told him that it represented only one of a number of options that could be considered if we were ever to resume medical operations at Majuro. I gathered that Dr. Vaswani may be charged by BNL to put together a bid in response to any DOE solicitation for its future medical program and work in the Marshalls. In fact, I would not be surprised if he isn't made interim Director of the BNL's MIMP (Marshall Islands Medical Program) since he was intensely curious about all aspects of our medical activities and its management, etc.

On May 8, Dr. Seligman and Geoff Judge arrived in Majuro. We met first with the Nuclear Claims Tribunal (NCT) in a cordial session chaired by Chairman-Judge Oscar De Brum. Paul gave an overview of his visit and the status of our medical program plans. The NCT welcomed the program being put out for bid, and especially liked DOE's plan to stress education and training of Marshallese. We later met with the US Embassy's Deputy Chief of Mission, Don Ahern who was fully briefed on Paul and Geoff's visit.

On Friday, May 9, we were privileged to meet with Acting Foreign Minister Jiba Kabua, who, after a short round of general discussions, presented us to President Imata Kabua. Also attending was Rongelap Senator Johnsay Riklon. We exchanged pleasantries and courtesies with President Kabua.

We had a working lunch with the 177 administrative staff, including Jack Jorban and Alan Hutchinson. Paul and Geoff also toured the 177 clinic and discussed issues of mutual concern. Our key meeting of the day however, was with Bikini Mayor Tomaki Juda and his principal Councilmen. The session proved to be remarkably pleasant and cordial. Clearly, Mayor Juda wants to maintain good relations with DOE and wants the continued presence of DOE at Bikini to monitor the radioactivity. Paul agreed to conclude a formal MOU with the Bikinians when they are in Washington at the end of May, pledged an open mind in looking at the outstanding issues between us during his scheduled visit the following week to Bikini, and promised to reimburse them for appropriate costs.

The highlight of the Majuro visit was the community meeting which took place that evening at the Majuro courthouse. While attended by only eight persons, six of whom were Rongelapese, it was a lively group who asked several good questions, most of which pertained to health care for their children or to their interest in getting fairly compensated for their claims to their own Claims Tribunal, or about resettling Rongelap Atoll.

The following day we proceeded to Kwajalein and were met on arrival by the Acting Commander, Elias Chin. Col. Chin stated that they enjoyed supporting DOE and the patients, and pledged to continue doing so. Paul and Geoff later toured the medical mission in operation at Kwajalein, met with medical staff, especially Dr. Howard, and had a private session with Kwaj Hospital Chief of Staff, Dr. Eric Lindborg and his advisers, to discuss medical needs and problems in the Marshalls. They also received a windshield tour of DOE's facilities at Kwajalein.

The major activity was the evening meeting with the community on Ebeye Island. The session was attended by 25 persons, most of whom were Rongelapese. Paul briefed the group on the purpose of his visit and opened up the floor to questions. Interestingly, like at Majuro, the questions concerned "bread and butter" issues like nuclear compensation, health care for their children, and grievances they seemed to have with their own RMI health care system. None complained about their medical care and problems, if any, with the DOE/BNL health care program. The session lasted nearly two hours.

On Sunday, we travelled to Bikini Atoll for an orientation visit. We were joined on the trip by BN's Gordon MacLeod. After a brief fly-over Bravo Crater, we landed on Eneu in a heavy rainstorm, and got thoroughly soaked on the 30 minute boat ride to Bikini Island. In fact, it rained considerably at Bikini the first couple of days. Nevertheless, Dr. Robison got us into the field to observe his sampling program and to brief us on the progress of his scientific experiments. It was, as always, an educational experience. Paul and Geoff had maximum opportunity to tour the field station, review its history, view old photographs, and obtain a true sense of our activities and of the operational realities at Bikini. We all came away much better informed about the train of events during the field station's transition period, and what were the DOE's essential obligations to the Council. I am confident the issues will be resolved very quickly, thus allowing for a return of stability in the DOE-Bikini relationship.

We returned to Kwajalein as scheduled on 5/14/97 and caught the evening flight to Honolulu. I believe Paul and Geoff learned much on the trip and gained a fuller understanding of the range of our field programs and activities. Their help will be especially necessary in resolving the outstanding issues with the Bikinians. I remain optimistic even as we enter a period of great uncertainty, centered on the medical program and its operations. It was relief to learn that whatever may be the motives and interests of the RMI in driving basic changes to the medical program, the patient-clients appear very pleased with the medical services they currently receive and seem all the more contented with the land-base program now centered at Kwajalein.


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