

HEADQUARTERS
WEATHER REPORTING ELEMENT, PROVISIONAL
APO 187, c/o Postmaster
San Francisco, California

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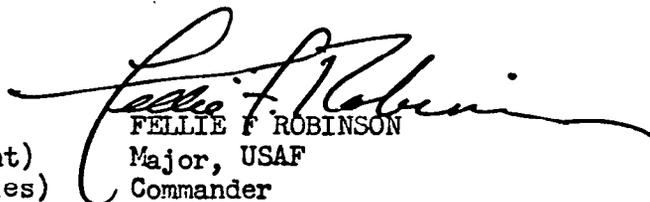
27 MAR 1954

SUBJECT: Rongerik Incident

TO: Commander
Test Services Unit, Provisional
APO 187

Inclosed is a report of personnel of this element on events which occurred 1 March 1954 through 3 March 1954 concerning radioactive contamination of personnel at Eniwetak Island, Rongerik Atoll, M.I.

- 3 Incls:
1. Rept (Rongerik Incident) by Maj Robinson (3Copies)
 2. Ltr fr Lt McDaniel to Maj Robinson, Subj: Evac of Rongerik Pers (3 Copies)
 3. Extract fr WOJG Kapral's Diary (3 Copies)


FELLIE F ROBINSON
Major, USAF
Commander

RG 342

Location Tech Lib B-2

Access No. AFWL

Folder The Rongerik

Incident MAR-APR 1954

CLASSIFICATION CANCELLED

BY AUTHORITY OF DOE/OG*

REVIEWED BY J. Diaz 8/6/86
DATE 7/10/85

* Per DNA LTR (USCM) 8/20/86
Carroll

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B/L fr Hqs WREP, APO 187, c/o PM, San Fran. Calif., Subj: Rongerik
Incident, dtd 27 Mar 54

1st Ind

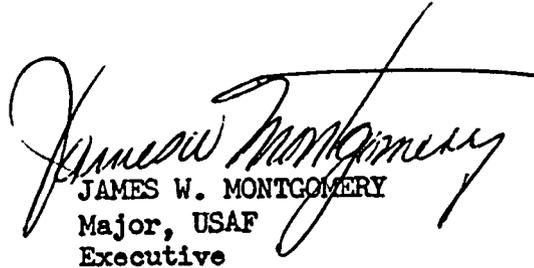
HEADQUARTERS, TEST SERVICES UNIT, PROVISIONAL, APO 187, c/o Postmaster,
San Francisco, California

30 MAR 1954

TO: Commander, Task Group 7.4, Provisional, APO 187, c/o Postmaster,
San Francisco, California

Forwarded for your information.

FOR THE COMMANDER:


JAMES W. MONTGOMERY
Major, USAF
Executive

3 Incls:

1. (1 cy w/d)
2. (1 cy w/d)
3. (1 cy w/d)

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AFWLJHD


RONGERIK INCIDENT

1 MAR 1954

I had no indications of any but usual operations from any of my detachments. Weather reports were coming a little late but considered excellent under the conditions. Example: Rongerik - 1 hour late, Ponape - 42 minutes, Kusaie - 1:05 late and Majuro - 11 minutes late.

About 2300 that night I received a message from my detachment at Rongerik DTG 010300Z as follows: "FOR JTF SEVEN ENIWETOK SMCLN PASS TO MR. BRESLIN PD AUTO MONITOR PRESENT READING IS ONE ZERO ZERO PLUS REPEAT ONE ZERO ZERO PLUS CMA PEN OFF CHART AND HAS BEEN IN THIS POSITION SINCE 0250 ZEBRA REQUEST ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF RECEIPT FROM BRESLIN SIGNED COMMDR". Since I attended a Radiological-Safety course at Keesler AFB in February - March 1949, I realized that serious fall-out might have occurred. I awakened Col. Hammond, Test Services Unit Commander, whose quarters are in the next room to mine, and explained the possibilities. The communications center personnel had explained that they were unable to contact Mr. Breslin at Parry Island and had called me since they were unable to obtain the desired acknowledgement of the message. Since I did not know the relationship of the monitor reading to the radiation value (Roentgens) I could not evaluate the seriousness of the situation. However, to preclude any serious effects and to minimize the danger of exposure, I prepared a message to WOJG Kapral, my Officer in Charge at Rongerik as follows: "CEASE ALL OPERATIONS IMED AND ALL PERS REMAIN INSIDE METAL BUILDINGS UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE PD MAINTAIN ROTATING SHIFT RADIO COMMUNICATIONS WITH 1DR FOR FURTHER INSTRUCTIONS PD ROBINSON SENDS". Major Montgomer, Executive for Test Services Unit was awakened and sent to the communications center to send out the message and wait there for further instructions from Col. Hammond. In the meantime we had called Col. Crosby

and Col. Houghton of TG 7.4 and Captain Chrestenson of the 4930th Test

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Support Group all concerned with radiological safety, and asked them to come over to my quarters for a conference. They arrived about the time Major Montgomery departed for the communications center. I also called Col. Miller of Task Group 7.1 to see if we could learn anything more definite on the seriousness of the situation. He informed me that Mr. Breslin was aboard the USS Estes and could not be contacted immediately. I requested that he make further efforts to evaluate the situation and let me know. Col. Hammond phoned Major Montgomery and asked him to relay the information in the original TWX to the USS Estes and this was accomplished. Since I had a weather island resupply flight going to Rongerik the next morning, I requested that a monitor be sent along with the flight to Rongerik. All agreed that this could and should be done and Captain Christenson said he would furnish one. Col. Miller called back and was unable to furnish additional information except that he believed the auto-monitor to be able to record a maximum on the order of one hundred milli-roentgens. After discussing the situation at length, we all agreed that since we were now certain that the information was in the hands of the radiological safety people on the USS Estes, a monitor would go into Rongerik the next day, and since my people were under cover, we had accomplished all we could possibly do that night. It was now about 0200. All departed and I remained up to take care of details concerning the monitor going by MATS to Kwajalein. About 0220, Captain Christenson returned to my room and said that he would go. However, he was PCS at Eniwetok and had no orders. We contacted the MATS Terminal people and found he had to be there before 0300 for departure. To expedite matters I decided to cut orders myself. This was done at

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Captain Christenson's office while he was obtaining his gear for the trip. Concerned with only the short time available to get Captain Christenson off I neglected to contact Col. Starkey, Commander, Test Support Unit. I saw him the next day and apologized for the oversight. However, Captain Christenson did get aboard the aircraft and arrived in plenty of time to go on our resupply flight. I returned to my quarters and went to bed it now being about 0330.

The next day about noon I heard rumors that Rongerik was being evacuated but exact details of this should be prepared by others since I do not have any definite information on it. I did coordinate with Test Services Unit and Task Group 7.4 personnel on and prepare the message sent to Comdr NAVSTA KWAJ requesting evacuation of personnel from Rongerik but understand that evacuation was already in process prior to the message reaching Kwajalein.

The next day Col. Hammond, at my request and upon coordination with Task Group 7.4, arranged for a C-47 flight to Kwajalein and return for Major Langford, Task Group 7.4 Flight Surgeon, and I. At Kwajalein, Major Langford talked to the Navy Flight Surgeon who had been in charge of our Rongerik evacuated personnel and obtained radioactivity information pertaining to them. I talked to the personnel.

Captain Christenson and Lt. McDaniel, from my headquarters, and Naval authorities had all indoctrinated my men on security precautions to be adhered to. In addition I gave orders that no one evacuated from Rongerik would talk to anyone concerning the incident or conditions at Rongerik regardless of rank, without express permission from Mr. Kapral. Mr. Kapral in turn would not give his permission without express orders from Captain Zacheo,



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JTF SEVEN Liaison Officer at Kwajalein. I discussed this at some length with Captain Zacheo and was satisfied that the security of the situation was well in hand.

My men were not alarmed by their situation and were enjoying their rest.

I found that upon arrival of our men at Kwajalein, a decontamination center had been immediately established and all personnel carefully monitored for radioactivity. Decontamination by numerous shower rinses had been effected and new clother issued from the Naval stores. Our people were segregated and placed in quarters with proper radiological safety precaution signs. I believe the Commander of Naval Station at Kwajalein accomplished most effective emergency measures. In behalf of my personnel, I am most appreciative of this action.

I made a copy of Mr. Kapral's diary for the period which is inclosed.

I also asked Lt. McDaniel to prepare a summary of the situation as he saw it during the period. He was at Kwajalein and went on the first flight to Rongerik. A copy of this will be forwarded as soon as possible. Lt. McDaniel is at present on a monitoring and equipment check assignment at Rongerik.



FELLIE F ROBINSON
Major, USAF
Commander, Wea. Rept. Elm, Prov.

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HEADQUARTERS
WEATHER REPORTING ELEMENT, PROVISIONAL
APO 187, c/o Postmaster
San Francisco, California

SUBJECT: Evacuation of Rongerik Personnel

TO: Commander
Weather Reporting Element, Prov.
APO 187

1. The following paragraphs contain a brief summary of events that I have knowledge of relative to evacuation of personnel on Rongerik Atoll.
2. I departed Eniwetok on 28 February by military aircraft and arrived at Kwajalein same date.
3. On 1 March I made plans with Commander McDaniel, Air Department Officer, Kwajalein NAS for visits to the weather islands including a visit to Rongerik on 2 March.
4. On 2 March I was awakened by my alarm clock at 0530 hours. When I left my room in the Air Force BOQ to proceed to the latrine I saw Lt Col Disana and Captain Christensen approaching the latrine. Captain Christensen stated that he had come to Kwajalein to accompany me to Rongerik to make a survey of the conditions on the atoll. Up until this time I was not aware of certain events that had occurred at Rongerik during the preceding 24 hours.
5. After a short discussion of the matter at the BOQ we proceeded to the MATS Terminal for breakfast. After eating breakfast we loaded all supplies consigned to Rongerik on the UF-1 Seaplane. Captain Christensen issued a film badge to each individual going on the trip to Rongerik. We got aboard the aircraft and departed at 0800 arriving over Rongerik Atoll approximately 0930. Captain Christensen had the pilot of the aircraft fly at various altitudes to enable him to record readings prior to landing and going ashore on Eniwetak Island. The readings on his instruments indicated that the atoll had experienced events that had not been anticipated. He tried to contact Eniwetok Atoll by aircraft radio but was unable to do same. He then contacted Kwajalein and requested that a message relative to conditions at Rongerik be relayed to Eniwetok. After flying around the atoll for approximately 2 hours, we landed in the lagoon at 1130 hours. Captain Christensen stated he would go ashore on Eniwetak Island to make a general survey of all areas. Upon going ashore he immediately began taking readings with his instrument in the Air Force living area. The survey results indicated events had occurred that made it imperative that all personnel be evacuated as soon as possible.

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WREP, Subj: Evacuation of Rongerik Pers"

6. Captain Christenson had WOJG Kapral select 8 men to depart on the return flight to Kwajalein. We departed from the Rongerik lagoon at 1230 hours and arrived at Kwajalein at 1400 hours.

7. Upon my arrival at Kwajalein, Admiral Clarke, Commander McDaniel, Captain Zackeo and many other people met the aircraft. A general discussion took place relative to evacuation of 20 personnel still on Rongerik. After several minutes had elapsed, I requested of Admiral Clarke that he send an aircraft to Rongerik to airlift the remaining personnel. The pilot of the aircraft stated that he would return and airlift the 20 remaining personnel after he had time to get a brief lunch. Admiral Clarke concurred in this procedure and the aircraft departed at approximately 1500 hours for Rongerik. The 20 personnel arrived at Kwajalein at approximately 1830 hours.

8. All personnel that were stationed on Rongerik and all passengers that went to Rongerik on the first flight had to be processed through the decontamination center at Kwajalein. Upon completion of same, personnel were then taken to the base hospital for a blood count test.

9. After completion of the blood count test, all enlisted personnel were assigned to Building 1150 for quarters pending further medical observation. The officer personnel were assigned quarters in Building 1141 pending further observation.

10. At approximately 1500 hours, 3 March, Major Langford and Major Robinson arrived from Eniwetok. Major Langford proceeded to the base hospital and held a conference with the base surgeon, Commander Hall. After completion of same, Major Langford gave a short briefing to all Rongerik personnel relative to their welfare.

11. T Sgt Neal and I were released from further medical observation so we departed at 1930 hours by aircraft for Eniwetok Atoll. All other personnel were retained at Kwajalein for further medical observation.

Joseph W. McDaniel
JOSEPH W McDANIEL
1st Lt, USAF

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Extract from WOJG Kapral's Diary -

1 Mar 54 - Monday:

Had a restful sleep, ear condition seemingly better. At 0645L, the western sky was brilliantly illuminated, almost requiring shading of the eyes. Illumination lasted for 55-60 seconds before it returned to normal. The top of the mushroom cloud was seen. About 11 minutes later the sound came through, rattling the buildings. The time it took the sound to reach here indicates the flash was about 136 miles away. The radiological "auto monitor" indicated its maximum reading at 1450L and stayed there to midnight end of the day. Hq WREP was notified at 1500L and first answer was received at 2330L, - "Conditions beyond our control, no reply expected before tomorrow". Normal operating until midnight.

2 Mar 54 - Tuesday:

Auto Monitor at max from midnight. Second message received at 0030L. "Cease all operations immediately and all personnel remain inside metal buildings until further notice. Maintain rotating shift radio communications with IIR for further instructions." At 0730L monitor still at max personnel had been exposed to .1 rn for 18 hours & Project total is 39 hours. At 1000 received MSG that a PEM was enroute to IIR4 and due in at 1037L. Arrived at 1030L & landed at 1130L after cruising around. Capt Chrestenson, rad-safe off ordered evacuation of all personnel after coming ashore and taking readings in living area. 8 men in alphabetical order were taken off at 1250L. Same A/C returned at 1715L and removed the rest of the detachment (20 men) took off at 1800L. Monitor stayed at maximum until removed from oper at 1700L/2nd Mar.

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