

# Office Memorandum • UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

TO : John Hall, Director, IA

DATE: April 6, 1955

FROM : John C. Bigher, M.D., Director  
Division of Biology and Medicine

*JCB*

402717

SUBJECT: CAUSE OF DEATH OF

SYMBOL: EM:JCB

The essential facts with respect to this case are these:

1. was exposed to the fall-out of the March 1, 1954 Bikini detonation as were the others of the crew of the Fukuyru Maru. He had serious general body exposure combined with local radiation burns of the skin;
2. He apparently was recovering from his radiation injury quite satisfactorily, and at the time of his death no recognizable internal radiation damage was reported and radio-chemical examination of tissues and the skeleton showed extremely low radioactivity; in fact, approaching levels which would be considered negligible from a health standpoint;
3. At a time when he was convalescing satisfactorily from his radiation injury, he developed hepatitis which was presumably of infectious type caused by a filterable virus. From this he grew steadily worse with severe liver pathology and generalized jaundice. After a prolonged illness, he died from the effects of hepatitis;
4. Such hepatitis is not in itself a direct consequence of radiation injury and does not constitute a part of such injury. In this case, however, the hepatitis is considered a complication of the illness caused by the radiation exposure and thus related to it in the sense that had the deceased not been involved in this accident, he would probably be alive today. Discussions as to the precise mode of acquisition of the hepatitis virus would be fruitless. Such infections are common and occur in all degrees of severity;

In view of the above, I would not wish to contend that the severity of the hepatitis was entirely unrelated to the previous illness caused by the radiation exposure. It is impossible to make any firm statement concerning this relationship. It is a reasonable line of argument that the prior injury and illness may have contributed to the severity of the complicating hepatitis, and thus have contributed to his death. While it is most likely,

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in my opinion, that the infectious agent was introduced through the transfusions used for treatment, it must be remembered that this virus may be, and commonly is, acquired in other ways. It would probably be of value if a general statement were released on this subject rather than to have it appear as press quotations of answers to specific and oftentimes poorly phrased questions asked on the spur of the moment.

cc: Chairman  
cc: General Manager  
cc: MSalisbury