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The Bikinians: A STUDY IN FORCED MIGRATION

Robert C. Kiste

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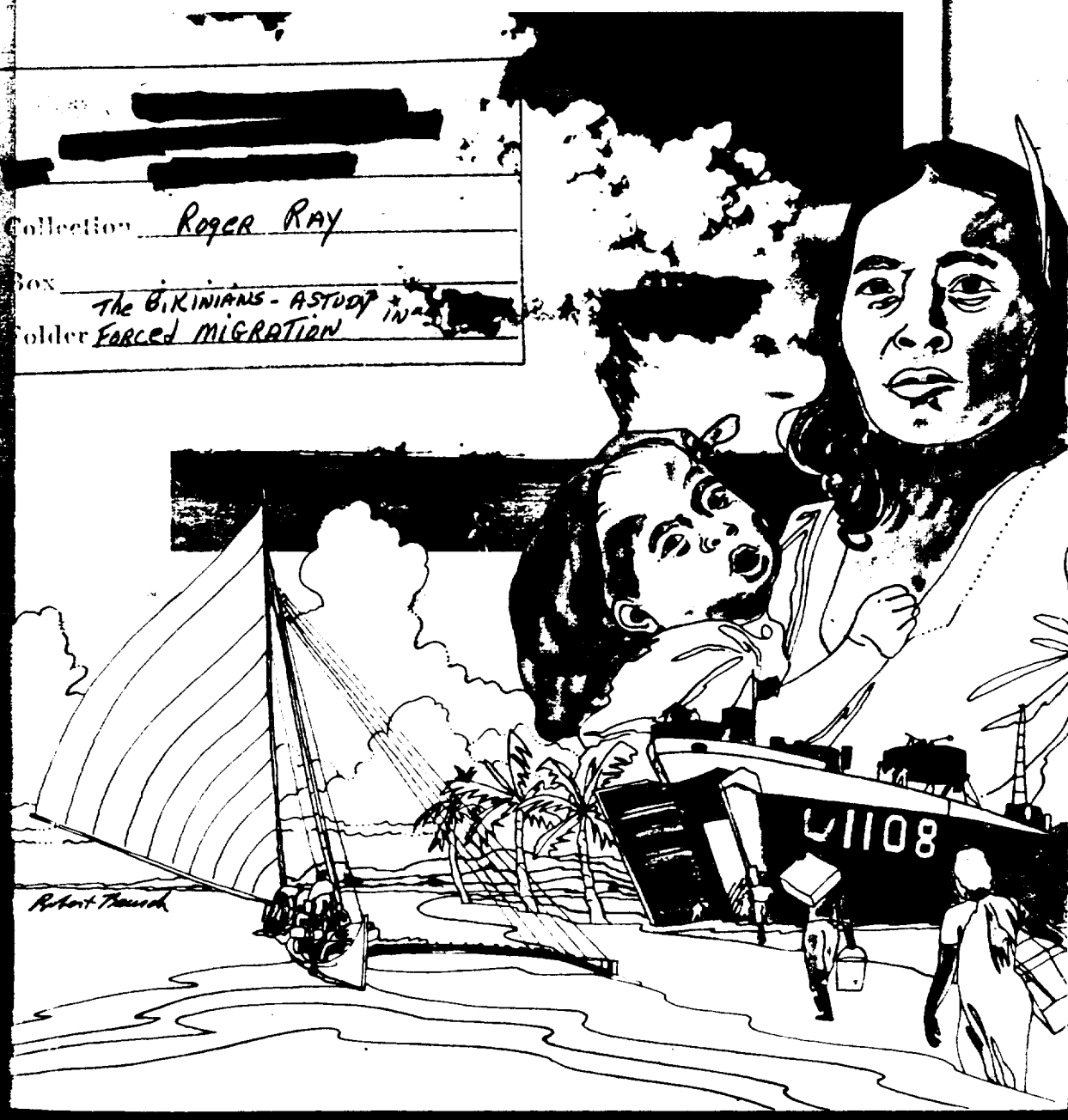


COMMENTS ON KISTE'S THE BIKINIANS

Page 147

Footnote continued from 146: Date should be 1958. Operation Hardtack, using both Bikini and Enewetak was conducted in Spring Summer 1958.

Page 175

Second sentence: 1957 should be 1958 (same reason)

Page 175

Accuracy of statement in third sentence should be checked against State Department reference (which we do not have).

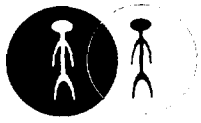
Page 194

Interior may wish to challenge the statement in the first full paragraph that plans for resettling the Enewetak people ". . . are now being formulated but only after recent legal proceedings became embarrassing for the United States Air Force. . ., etc."

I believe the record will show that the decision to release Enewetak from Defense Department control, and thus make it available for rehabilitation was taken independent of and in fact prior to the initiation of the PACE litigation.

R. Ray

THE KISTE AND OGAN SOCIAL CHANGE SERIES IN ANTHROPOLOGY



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Robert C. Kiste was born and raised in Indiana. After completing his undergraduate studies in anthropology at Indiana University in 1961, he took his graduate training at the University of Oregon, where his Ph.D. in anthropology was awarded in 1967. In the same year, he moved to the University of Minnesota where he now has an appointment as associate professor of anthropology. While on sabbatical leave during the 1972-73 academic year, he taught at the University of Hawaii. Dr. Kiste's specializations and interests include social and cultural change, the history of anthropology, and Oceania, particularly Micronesia. Among his current professional memberships are the American Anthropological Association, the Association for Social Anthropology in Oceania, and the Society for Applied Anthropology.

THE BIKINIANS

Cummings Publishing Company

A Study in Forced Migration

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University of Minnesota

Menlo Park, California · Reading, Massachusetts
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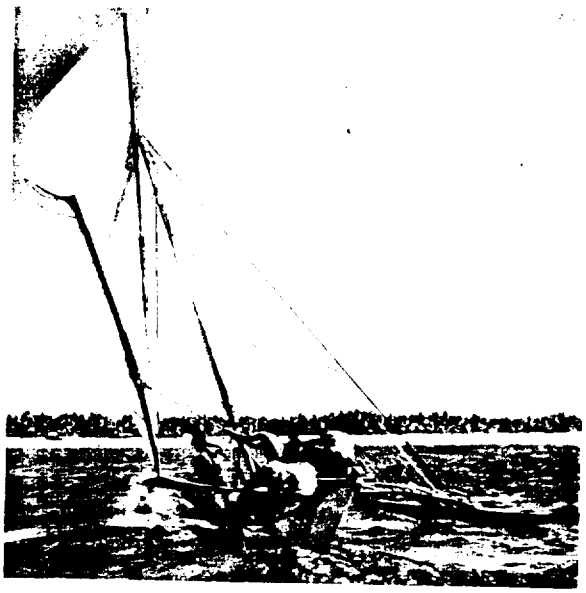


Plate 1. Outrigger sailing canoe with Bikini Island in background, 1946. *(Photo by Carl Mydans. Time-Life, Inc.)*

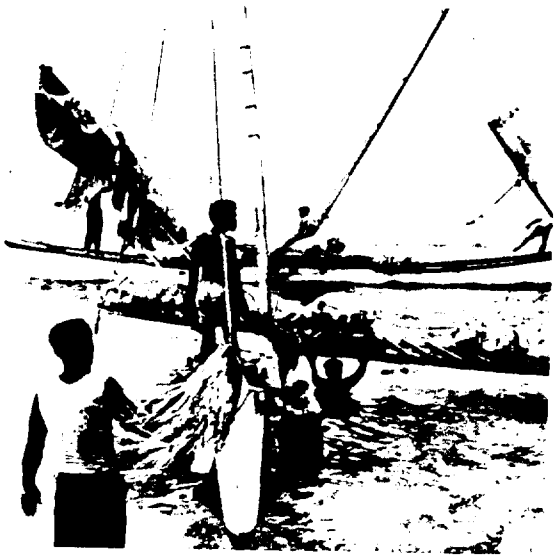


Plate 2. Outrigger sailing canoe similar to those used by the Bikinians prior to their relocation. The outrigger in foreground is being loaded with copra bags. (The canoes are those of the Enewetok people on Ujelang Atoll.) *(Photo by author.)*

of recreation. Men sometimes sailed simply for sport, and fishing expeditions were seldom devoted entirely to work. Men took pleasure in their fishing ventures, often stopping at small islands to refresh themselves with coconut and to explore for driftwood and other objects cast up by the sea.

Men devoted a considerable amount of time and energy to constructing and maintaining their canoes. They fashioned hulls from hand-shaped planks which were lashed together with sennit. Maintenance was a never-ending task as canoes frequently required caulking, renewal of sennit lashings, and replacement of broken or deteriorated planks. Men took great pride in their canoes; a craft that was swift and easily maneuverable was especially prized (Kiste 1972:80-82).

All economic activity was suspended on Sundays. The most routinized aspects of Bikinian life were the consequences of mission effort. By 1946, the islanders' version of the fundamentalistic Protestantism derived from New England had become firmly established as an integral part of their culture. (Spoehr's description of the mixture of traditional and Christian beliefs and the organization of the church at Majuro is fairly representative of the entire Marshalls [1949:221-31].) The pastor of the church was a Bikini man who had been trained by the missionaries. The community celebrated all Protestant holidays. The Sabbath was observed with both morning and afternoon services and a strict prohibition on work and most recreation. Two afternoon services marked the weekly calendar, and elders of the church met on the first of each month to conduct church business and to plan services for the coming month.

Initial Relocation

The detonation of atomic bombs over Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 had ended the war in the Pacific and ushered the world into the Atomic Age. The nature and effects of the destructive force that had outmoded earlier concepts of warfare were, however, little known or understood, and the future role of nuclear weapons in the arsenal of the United States was undetermined. In the weeks following the war, American military

and political leaders began planning nuclear experiments to gather military and scientific knowledge. Attention soon focused on the question of the effects of nuclear weapons employed against naval vessels (Hines 1962:21). A pair of tests given the code name of Operation Crossroads was planned, and in November of 1945 a search for an appropriate site began.[5] It had to be located in an area controlled by the United States and was to be uninhabited or have a small population which could be easily relocated. The site had to be in a climatic zone free from storms and cold temperatures, and have a large and sheltered anchorage for a fleet of target vessels. The danger of radioactive contamination required a site distant from heavily populated areas and at least 500 miles from all sea and air routes. In late January, 1946, navy officials in Washington, D.C. announced that Bikini Atoll fulfilled all climatic and geographical conditions for Operation Crossroads. Ironically, some of the same factors of geography and environment which had limited the Bikinians' contact with the outside world caused an abrupt end to their isolation and thrust them into the mainstream of events of the twentieth century. Further, the Christianity which the islanders had accepted from Americans was employed to convince them of the necessity of their relocation.

The Bikinians' initial relocation was accomplished swiftly and with little planning. The military governor of the Marshalls obtained the consent of the Bikinians' paramount chief to move his subjects. On Sunday, February 10, 1946 the governor, members of his staff, and the paramount chief arrived at Bikini by seaplane. After the morning church services had been concluded, the Bikinians were addressed by the governor. According to his own account, he drew upon the Bible and:

> . . . compared the Bikinians to the children of Israel whom the Lord saved from their enemy and led unto the Promised Land. He told them of the bomb that men in America had made and the destruction it had wrought upon the enemy (Richard 1957:510).

---

[5] After Operation Crossroads in 1946, Bikini was not utilized as a nuclear test site for eight years. In 1954, further tests were conducted at the atoll, and the last occurred in 1958 (Hines 1962:157-195; 270-292).

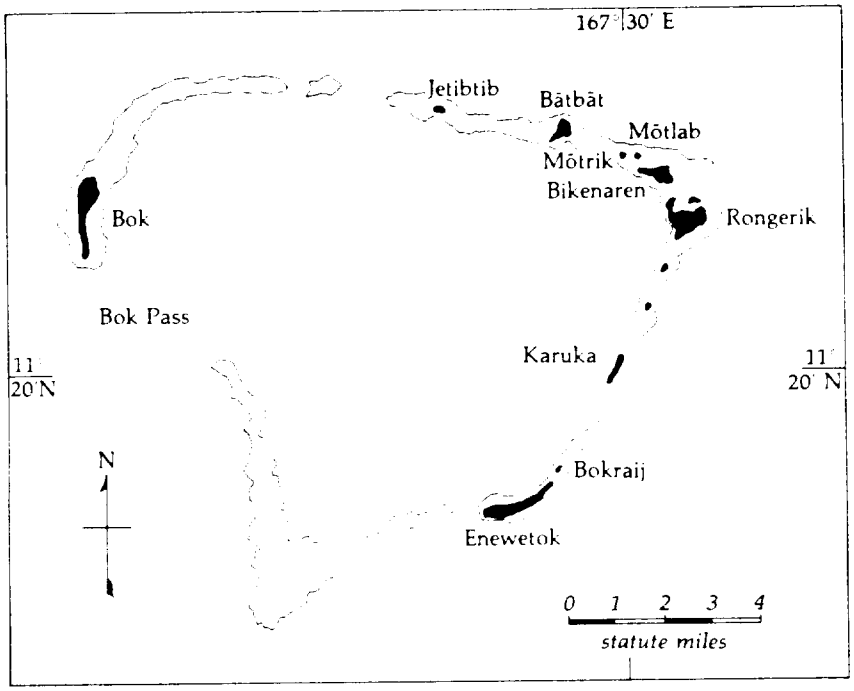
He further explained that scientists were experimenting with nuclear devices ". . .for the good of mankind and to end all world wars" and told how the navy had searched the world for a test site and had determined that Bikini was the best (ibid.).

The Bikinians deliberated, and according to the governor's description of events, chief Juda reported their decision:

> If the United States government and the scientists of the world want to use our island and atoll for furthering development, which with God's blessing will result in kindness and benefit to all mankind, my people will be pleased to go elsewhere (Mason 1954:263).

While official sources report that the Bikinians agreed to relocate for the good of all humanity, it is more likely that other factors were critical in shaping their decision. The islanders were accustomed to authority imposed from the outside (the paramount chief and the colonial governments which preceded that of the Americans), and in 1946, they were still impressed by the United States' decisive defeat of Japan. The Americans' description of their nuclear weapons further convinced them of the power and technological superiority of the United States, and when they were requested to give up their ancestral homeland by both the Americans and their paramount chief, it is doubtful that they believed that they had any alternative but to comply.

It is not certain whether the problem of selecting a site for the resettlement of the community was discussed during the governor's visit to Bikini. An official report of the relocation simply indicates: "Of the eleven family heads (*alab*), nine named Rongerik Atoll as their first choice for the resettlement" (Meade 1946). There were several factors which appeared to determine the Bikinians' selection of Rongerik. First, the islanders were familiar with the atoll since it is only eighteen miles from Rongelab whose people the Bikinians had long been in contact (see Map 1). Second, Rongerik was uninhabited, and resettlement there offered the promise that the Bikinians could continue their lives free from the interference of outsiders. Lastly, there is some evidence which indicates that the Bikinians were never convinced that their relocation was more than a temporary measure, and as a result, they may not have considered the selection of a new home site to be an important matter.



Map 4. Rongerik Atoll.

Surveys of Rongerik by navy personnel revealed that it might present some problems of economic self-sufficiency for the community. The atoll is much smaller than Bikini. In contrast to Bikini's twenty-six islands and land area of 2.32 square miles, Rongerik has only ten islands with a total area of about 0.63 square miles; the largest of the ten islands covers a scant 0.17 square miles as opposed to the 0.66 square miles of Bikini Island. Rongerik's lagoon of fifty-five square miles is less than one-fourth that of Bikini's (see Map 4). Further, as Rongerik was only occasionally visited by the people of Rongelab, it was not developed to support a permanent population of any size, and the quality and quantity of its subsistence crops were not impressive (Mason 1954:264).

The administration sought the counsel of the Bikinians' paramount chief. He urged that the people be moved to either Ujae or Lae Atolls in northern Ralik; both were inhabited and

were included within his domain.[6] The chief was strongly opposed to the Bikinians' choice of Rongerik; it and Rongelab were part of the realm of another paramount chief. Aerial and sea reconnaissance by navy officials eliminated Ujae because of navigational and beaching facilities, and Lae was considered too small to support both its own inhabitants and the Bikinians.[7]

By February 23, officials announced that they judged Rongerik the best of the three alternatives. That same day, an LST arrived at Bikini laden with supplies required to build a new village.[8] The provisions included canvas, prefabricated tent frames, wooden floor platforms, lumber, cement, corrugated metal roofing for water catchment, carpentry and masonry tools, 30,000 gallons of fresh water, and a food supply for the community. At the instruction of the Americans, the Bikinians dismantled their church and council house (both were well-built structures considered worthy of removal) and prepared large quantities of pandanus leaf thatch for transport to Rongerik. An advance party of twenty-two Bikini men and fifteen Seabees boarded the vessel, and it departed on the evening of the day it arrived.

Rongerik was reached the following day. The advance party cleared land on the main island for a village and erected the tent frames. Within eight days, the military government officer in charge of the operation reported that the ". . . essential construction of the village was complete" (Meade 1946). On March 5 the LST started out for Bikini leaving a skeleton work force on Rongerik to apply canvas to the tent frames and to construct concrete cisterns.

As preparations were being made for the islanders' relocation, ships began entering the Bikini lagoon to launch Operation Crossroads. The operation was a military-scientific program of a magnitude which had no precedent. About 250 vessels (70 of which became target ships), more than 150 aircraft for transport, liaison, and observation, and some 42,000 military, scientific, and technical personnel and observers were eventually involved. Unquestionably, the operation was the most thoroughly documented reported, and publicized peacetime military exercise in history. The official records fill volumes, and coverage by the press was authorized by the President of the United States. Such concentration of attention in addition to the sheer magnitude of the operation gave Crossroads the quality of the spectacular (Hines 1962:31-32).

The Navy Hydrographic Office survey ships *Sumner* and *Bowditch* were among the first to arrive. Their crews consisted of oceanographers, geologists, botanists, biologists, and engineers. These specialists conducted surveys of the islands, reef, and lagoon, catalogued and classified the flora and fauna, and blasted a deep water channel through the reef to the beach on the main island to facilitate the passage of various landing craft.

As more vessels arrived, the tempo of preparatory activities increased, and the Bikinians were overwhelmed by all that they observed. Most of the islanders received their first introduction to motion pictures while waiting for relocation. Each evening, movies were shown on the afterdeck of the *Sumner*. While it is certain that they understood little of what they saw, they were reported completely engrossed with such films as a Roy Rogers western, a Hollywood bedroom farce, and Mickey Mouse in technicolor (Markwith 1946:108).

A great amount of publicity and fanfare was focused upon the Bikinians. Much to the displeasure of the paramount chief, Juda became known in the American press as "King Juda of Bikini." Commercial newsreel teams arrived at the atoll during the last week of February, and by the time a navy photographic

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[6] Ujae Atoll has fourteen islands with a total land area of 0.72 square miles; its lagoon area is about 72 square miles. In 1946, its population numbered slightly over 120 people. Lae Atoll has seventeen islands with a total land area of 0.56 square miles and a small lagoon of less than 7 square miles. In 1946, its population was about 100 (Bryan 1972:142-143; Mason 1954:265).

[7] The naval historian, Commander Dorothy E. Richard, indicates that Wotho Atoll was also recommended by the paramount chief at this time as another possibility for resettlement. Richard also reports that several Bikinians were flown to Wotho, Ujae, and Lae to inspect the atolls (1957:511). The official report by the military government officer in charge of the relocation, however, makes no mention of Wotho nor does it indicate that any of the Bikinians were given the opportunity to inspect the sites proposed for initial resettlement (Meade 1946). Richard confused the events surrounding the Rongerik relocation with those of a later date.

[8] An LST is a naval craft specially designed for putting ashore troops and equipment.

team from Washington, D.C. arrived on March 2, the Bikinians had learned the meaning of the motion picture camera and were enjoying the novelty of posing for photographers. On Sunday, March 3, photographers recorded the last church service performed on Bikini, and the islanders cooperated by repeating the service three times before the camera men were satisfied. One of them later commented that the people were in the process of becoming movie actors:

> The young girls were especially susceptible and giggled and posed as soon as a lens was turned their way. However, by the third day of our stay, there were so many photographers around, all shooting at once, that the girls hardly knew whom to pose for. As soon as one of the professionals settled on an angle, several of the amateurs fell in around him, and after much discussion of exposure, film speed, etc., there was a fusillade of shutter clicks (Markwith 1946:109).

Apparently, the military government had originally planned to move the Bikinians on March 6, but the demands of the news agencies and navy photographic team caused a one day delay in the loading of the LST which had returned from Rongerik. The military governor's February 10th visit to Bikini and his negoti-

Plate 3. Last church service on Bikini, 1946. *(World Wide Photos.)*

ations with the people were re-enacted for the photgraphers. The community's cemetery was cleaned and decorated with flowers and palm fronds, and a ceremony was held to bid farewell to the Bikinians' ancestors and to entrust their souls to the care of God. The purpose of the ceremony was marred when the camera-conscious Bikinians vied for positions immediately in front of the cameras, and it was necessary to repeat the performance for a second filming (see photographs in Markwith's article in the *National Geographic Magazine* July, 1946).

By the afternoon of March 7, the islanders had loaded their personal possessions, nearly one ton of pandanus thatch panels, and canoes on board the LST. They crowded the rails of the main deck as the vessel departed Bikini's lagoon. Some sang songs of farewell. Most were silent; some wept (Mason 1954: 276). A photographer who accompanied the Bikinians on their

Plate 4. Bikinians loading their personal possessions aboard LST 1108 for the move to Rongerik, 1946. *(Photo by Carl Mydans. Time-Life, Inc.)*

overnight voyage to Rongerik provided the first documentary evidence that they considered their relocation to be a temporary inconvenience; he was informed by the islanders ". . . that they would come back to Bikini someday" (*Life Magazine* 20:105-109, March 25, 1946).

The Bikinians arrived at Rongerik on March 8, 1946. Less than a month had elapsed since the date they had first learned of their impending relocation.

Rongerik and Kwajalein

The Rongerik Resettlement

Upon their arrival at Rongerik in early March, 1948, the Bikinians found their new village was incomplete, although, a total of twenty-six tent structures, the same number of dwellings that had been abandoned at Bikini, had been prepared by the advance party. In contrast to Bikini's dispersed settlement pattern, the Rongerik village plan, prepared by Americans, resembled a community in the United States—dwellings were arranged in a compact L-shaped cluster on the main island. Before the community was disembarked, the naval officer in charge had Juda go ashore to determine which dwellings were to be occupied by each household (Meade 1946). Perhaps as a result of Juda's hurried, spur of the moment allocation of dwellings, two households which had been adjacent at Bikini were assigned dwellings at opposite ends of the village. Other households which had been adjacent were given dwellings in close proximity to one another. The general composition of ten of the eleven households was preserved, and the eleventh was divided when the widowed brother of *alab A* and his children were given a separate residence. He was to remarry shortly thereafter, and his nuclear family came to comprise a twelfth household. The households were no longer located on parcels of land, however, and this remained the situation for the duration of the settlement; land was never divided on Rongerik.

As the Bikinians settled into their new surroundings, the officer in charge directed their work. Men were given meals and paid

a small sum for their labor. It was hoped that this arrangement would give the people a cash reserve and permit direct supervision of their work. With the construction of concrete cisterns, the village was considered virtually finished, and all Americans departed by the end of the month. The Bikinians were left with the task of replacing the canvas coverings of the tent frames with pandanus thatch.

Food provided by the Americans was sufficient for several weeks. The community's small store was well stocked. All tools and surplus materials left from the construction work were given to the Bikinians. They also received a radio receiver and a gasoline generator so they could keep abreast of developments at Bikini. A press release issued by naval authorities reported that the relocation was an unqualified success.

> The Seabees built a model village on Rongerik that anyone would be proud to live in, complete down to Chick Salers of the latest model, which it is hoped the natives will admire and perhaps use. The natives are delighted, enthusiastic about the atomic bomb, which already has brought them prosperity and a new promising future (*Honolulu Star Bulletin*, April 1, 1946, quoted from Mason 1954:283).

The resettlement's initial weeks were something of a honeymoon period. In addition to the American supplied food, the Bikinians collected a rich harvest of coconuts and pandanus from trees which had long been unexploited except by small parties of Rongelabese which had occasionally visited the atoll. As soon as the people began to subsist on local foods, it became apparent that Rongerik's resources had been greatly overestimated, and were, in fact, inadequate. The coconuts were smaller than those to which the people were accustomed, and it was discovered that both the palms and pandanus trees were less productive than those of Bikini. All coconuts were required for subsistence; surplus was not available for copra. The quantity and quality of fish and other marine fauna in the lagoon proved to be poor in comparison to Bikini, and the people learned that certain species of fish which were edible at Bikini were toxic in Rongerik's waters. Consumption of these fish caused stomach disorders, diarrhea, and partial paralysis of the limbs.[1]

Other difficulties were encountered. After exhausting a supply carried from Bikini, the islanders found that the fiber from the husks of Rongerik's coconuts was of such poor quality that it could not be processed into durable sennit. As a result, some dwellings remained unthatched and canoe repairs were not made.

Less than two months after their arrival, the Bikinians expressed anxiety over Rongerik's resources and made the first of their many requests to be returned home. The administration suspected, however, that they were beginning to depend too much upon the government and were not making an effort to adjust to the atoll. This suspicion was reinforced by visitors to Rongerik who reported a lack of activity and enthusiasm. During Operation Crossroads, Rongerik was a side show for Americans involved in the main event at Bikini. Sea planes which shuttled back and forth between Kwajalein and Bikini frequently landed at Rongerik for the benefit of some official party or newsmen. The Bikinians grew accustomed to their visitors and took full advantage of their appearances to exchange handicraft for cigarettes, money, and other items. Such occasions interrupted the islanders' normal routine, and visitors went away with the impression that the people were engaged in little constructive activity. Other evidence indicates, however, that the Bikinians were attempting to extend the planting of coconut and pandanus to increase Rongerik's resource base (Kiste 1968:56).

The administration also feared that ineffective leadership was the source of some of the islanders' troubles. As Juda's succession to the chieftainship had been recent and contested, he suffered under the handicap of his own inexperience, and he probably did not have the support of the faction which had op-

[1] This phenomenon is quite common in the Pacific; a species of fish eaten without ill effects in one locale may cause illness, sometimes fatal, in another. There is some reason to believe that the poisoning originates in the diet of fish, but whatever its source, its chemical nature is unknown (Wiens 1962: 292-294).

posed his incumbency. Further, Juda had little experience in dealing with Americans, and it is very likely that he was intimidated by navy officers of high rank. Thus, at a time when he was being heralded by the press as "King of Bikini" and was attempting to cope with problems of a magnitude which no chief before him had ever encountered, he made a poor impression on Americans. He appeared indecisive and ". . . seemed to be confused by the demands made upon him as a leader of the displaced group" (Mason 1954:294).

The Americans did not believe they could simply change the community's leadership, and they became increasingly concerned as the Bikinians continued to experience difficulties and reiterated their plea to return home. In an attempt to convince them that Bikini was unsafe, Juda was flown there after the first atomic test had been conducted on July 1, 1946. The test had been an aerial shot over the lagoon; vessels in the target area had sustained great damage, but there were few visible results on shore. Trees were bearing and appeared unharmed; the danger of radioactive contamination could not be observed, and Juda did not understand its hazards. He returned to Rongerik unconvinced, and the second and final test in Operation Crossroads was conducted on July 25, 1946.

Continued consumption of Rongerik's crops exhausted the supply, and in August, 1946 the Bikinians became alarmed when the palms stopped bearing. This had never occurred at Bikini, and the people reported it to the administration. While the cause of the phenomenon was never discerned, the Bikinians had their own explanation for it and their other troubles. Rongerik had a bad reputation among Marshallese because of its association with Libokra, an evil female *ekejab* 'spirit'. According to myth, Libokra once lived in the southern Marshalls where Rongerik was originally located. She stole the atoll and hid it among the northern islands. Libokra attempted to settle at Bikini, but was driven off by Orijabato, a benevolent spirit who resided there and guarded the Bikinians. Libokra fled and wherever she visited, fish became poisoned and the crops declined. Eventually, she returned to Rongerik where she died. Her body was cast into the lagoon, and those fish which ate it became poisoned and have ever since made people ill when eaten (Erdland 1914:348; Mason 1954:286-287).

Americans were surprised that Libokra had not been mentioned before the relocation. The Bikinians explained that they had always been concerned with her malevolent influence, and that on their first day ashore, parents had warned children not to eat or drink anything until adults had sampled local foods. They claimed, however, that initially they had considered Libokra to be relatively unimportant because they had understood that their relocation was a temporary measure and a short term inconvenience could be endured.

In the following months, the situation worsened. Food shortages occurred during the winter of 1946-47. In May, 1947, all hope of a successful settlement ended when a fire of undetermined origin destroyed thirty percent of the trees on the main island and drastically reduced food supplies. As an emergency measure, the Bikinians began to make voyages by sailing canoe over the eighteen miles which separated them from Rongelab. Old people and children were taken to stay with relatives and fellow clansmen, and the sailors usually returned to Rongerik with food provided by the Rongelabese (Mason 1948:17).

The situation caused the governor of the Marshalls to appoint a Board of Investigation composed of three navy officers and one civilian to evaluate the islanders' plight. The Board convened at Rongerik in early June, and the people were told that its members had come ". . . to look at the island and talk about moving" (Records of Proceedings of a Board . . . . 1947). In a session with the council, chief Juda was questioned; he reported that there was insufficient food, the store was bankrupt, fresh water supplies were low, and the atoll had only one brackish well. He told the Board that of several sites which had been suggested for relocation, the council had decided upon Kili Island. Each *alab* was questioned, and all affirmed the preference for Kili.

Later in the month, Juda, *alab B* of the second ranking Ijjirik lineage, Lokwiar's son (the council scribe), and the Makaoliej *alab M* accompanied the Board on a survey of Kili Island and Ujae and Wotho Atolls.[2] They examined each as a possible relocation site,

[2] As described in Chapter Two, Ujae Atoll was considered as a possible relocation site prior to the Rongerik resettlement. Wotho had not been considered previously. Wotho

and the four Bikinians were returned to Rongerik to consult with their fellows and decide upon their first and second choices for a new home. The paramount chief was consulted, and he responded with a document offering the Bikinians land at either Ujae or Wotho both of which were in his domain. On July 25, the Bikinians made a written reply to the military government:

> To the Office at Kwajalein
> From the Council of Rongerik
>
> Gentleman:
>
> I have choosen the place where to go to live on and it is the island of Ebbetyu and Enelamoj (Ujae). These we have all agreed upon.
>
> But now I have been thinking, since these move will be the last move and the place we go to will be our home forever and ever therefore we wish to be removed to an atoll where there are no other people. These is what we ask of you but we will do whatever you'll say (Ibid.).

During the same month, the Marshalls and other islands of the former League of Nations Japanese Mandate became the United States Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands within the framework of the United Nations Trusteeship Council. The military government was ended, but as an interim measure, the navy was delegated the responsibility for the new civil administration until authority was transferred to a civilian agency. With the creation of the Trust Territory, however, the welfare of the islanders became subject to the scrutiny of international representatives of the Trusteeship Council, and the resettlement of the Bikinians was no longer a matter that could be handled discreetly by agencies of the United States government (Mason 1954:314).

Concurrent with these events, the situation at Rongerik further deteriorated. A medical officer who accompanied a July field trip to the atoll reported that the Bikinians were "visibly suffering from malnutrition" (Ibid.). The council's ambivalent response had not helped solve the problem, and in another attempt to convince the Bikinians that a return home was impossible and that it was necessary to make a decision about their future, the governor of the Marshalls flew to Bikini with Juda and the same three Bikinians who had accompanied him on the earlier survey of Kili, Ujae, and Wotho. They spent several days on Bikini in early August, but, as in Juda's previous visit, the administration's idea backfired. Bikini was occupied by a team of scientists involved in the Bikini Resurvey, a two-month long investigation of the effects of the atomic tests. The presence of the researchers suggested to the Bikinians that humans could live on the atoll without harm. Further, more than a year had elapsed since the nuclear tests, and the lagoon's marine fauna appeared healthy and abundant. Unexploited trees were laden with coconuts, and the only change the islanders ". . . professed to notice was the presence of a new plant, papaya, the seeds of which may have been introduced during Crossroads" (Hines 1962:64).

In mid-August, the Board took Juda and the same three men to Ujelang. The atoll is located in northern Ralik (see Map 1, page 10). It had been a commercially operated copra plantation before World War II and had been uninhabited for several years. The Bikinians thought it "nice" and were returned to Rongerik with their observations. On August 26, the people notified the administration:

> Gentlemen:
>
> We the council have held a meeting to find the best place to go to. We have been to some other places to inspect and have considered them. In moving we find it quite a problem. The place we all agreed to stay on is Rongerik Atoll (Records of Proceedings of a Board . . . . . 1947).

The civilian member of the Board was replaced by another, an agriculturalist, who conducted a survey of Rongerik, Kili, Ujae, and Ujelang. His report substantiated the Bikinians' reports; Rongerik's resources had grown so low that the islanders had begun cutting down young palms to eat the heart, a progressively destructive procedure which could only reduce future harvests. The agriculturalist described the islanders as a defeated, frustrated, poverty-stricken people who thought of home only as Bikini. In his opinion, their departure from Rongerik had already been too long delayed. He judged Ujelang's resources as adequate and rec-

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square miles; its lagoon covers 36.6 square miles. In the latter part of the 1940s, its population was between thirty to forty islanders (Bryan 1972: 142-143; Mason 1954:310).

ommended it as the best site for resettlement (MacMillan 1947).

On September 1, the governor and the Board flew to Rongerik to learn why the Bikinians had decided to remain there. They indicated that their primary concern was to return to Bikini, and they could not agree on another relocation site. To them, Ujelang was too distant and lacked pandanus. Wotho was too small; it and Ujae were inhabited, and resettlement on either could result in populations too large for existing resources. Further, the Bikinians wanted to keep their community intact, and they were strongly opposed to residing with another population. Kili, while uninhabited, had no lagoon and was now judged undesirable. They wished to stay on Rongerik because of its relatively close proximity to Bikini, and they reportedly felt obligated to remain because of the village constructed by the Americans. The islanders also feared that the costs and effort required by another relocation might earn them the displeasure of the Americans. The possibility of moving to Ujelang was discussed, and the Americans returned to Kwajalein.

The Board concluded that Rongerik was inadequate and expressed doubt that it could ever produce resources sufficient for the people. The Board's first choice was to return the people to Bikini. Assuming that this was impossible, it recommended resettlement at Ujelang. The governor concurred and determined the feasibility of Bikini's reoccupation. The results of the investigations conducted by the Bikini Resurvey, however, revealed that radiological activity precluded Bikini's habitation by a permanent population for years to come.

In late September, 1947, the Bikinians became pawns in internal squabbles within the United States government. The agriculturalist's report on conditions at Rongerik came into the possession of a Washington, D.C. syndicated newspaper columnist. He, a former Secretary of the Interior and long time critic of the naval island administration, charged the navy with the responsibility for the sorry condition of the islanders. The Bikinians became the subject of newspaper articles and editorials throughout the United States and Europe. As a consequence, public opinion as well as the threat of censure by the United Nations placed considerable pressure on navy officials to rectify the situation.

During the second week of October, Juda and at least two

alab were flown to Ujelang in an effort to persuade them to resettle there. On October 17, navy officials announced that the Bikinians were to be moved to Ujelang (Mason 1954:325). Apparently, the Bikinians had agreed to the move, and on November 22 ten Bikini men and twenty Seabees arrived at Ujelang with materials to construct a village. Less than two weeks later, officials in Washington, D.C. advised the administration in the Marshalls that Enewetok Atoll was to be used for a second series of atomic tests and that its inhabitants had to be moved immediately. Operations in the Marshalls changed accordingly. The Enewetok people were moved to Ujelang on December 21; the Bikinians remained on Rongerik. The governor consulted with Juda and the council, who reportedly decided that perhaps an adjustment to the atoll was possible after all. Shortly thereafter, the High Commissioner of the Territory decided to conduct a comprehensive study of the Bikini people to determine the "... underlying causes of their apparent discontent" (Richard 1957:525).

Response to Crisis

Leonard Mason, an anthropologist from the University of Hawaii, was engaged to conduct the investigation. He and an assistant, Mr. James Milne, an islander of mixed Micronesian/European descent, flew to Rongerik by sea plane on January 31, 1948. Their arrival coincided with the most critical food shortage yet experienced. Only immature coconuts and pandanus fruits were available. Arrowroot was exhausted on the main island and nearly depleted on others. The community's store had only one hundred pounds of flour. Canoes were in disrepair because of the lack of sennit and, as a result, fishing was largely curtailed and the relief voyages to Rongelab had ended. Adults were even consuming small quantities of those fish which were found to have toxic qualities.

The Communal Organization. Mason learned that, when their traditional household and lineage organization had proven ineffective in coping with the crisis, the islanders had responded by reorganizing their community into a single cooperative unit.

Plate 8. Chief Juda and his wife in 1946 or 1947. *(U.S. Navy photo.)*

Subsistence activities were coordinated by the council, and men were divided into groups and assigned work on the basis of their expertise at different tasks. The best fishermen fished, some men collected vegetable crops, and the rest worked at other chores. In an effort to conserve and to ensure an equal distribution of food, the gathering of coconuts and pandanus from trees in and about the village area was prohibited without the council's consent. The village was divided into four sections with equal memberships, and each was headed by an *alab*. Juda headed one section, the second ranking Ijjirik *alab* headed a second, and the major *alab* of Makaoliej and Rinamu headed the third and fourth. Food was divided by the council into equal shares for the sections, and the *alab* in charge of each allotted it equally among its members.

The Paramount Chief. Mason's research also revealed that the Bikinians' decisions about another relocation site were shaped by factors unknown to the administration. The Bikinians' resettlement on Rongerik had undermined the paramount chief's au-

thority over them, and a number of islanders were advocating that they should seize the opportunity to terminate their subordinate status to him. As noted earlier, Rongerik was within the realm of another paramount chief who had agreed to the Bikinians' resettlement in his territory. Subsequently, no consideration had been given to the Bikinians' future relationship with either of the two chiefs. The situation was without precedent in Marshallese history; the islanders were residing on one chief's land, and at the same time, they were supposedly the subjects of another.

The deprivations which the Bikinians were experiencing provided grounds for questioning their relations with their own paramount chief. They recalled that it was his responsibility to aid them in a time of need, yet they had received no assistance from him. Some Bikinians believed that the Americans, particularly the navy, should become their paramount chief and had begun to develop a rationale in support of their position.

> After all, they argued, who established a school and medical dispensary on Bikini and provided training for Bikinians to administer both? Who had gone to a great trouble and expense to see that Bikinians were safely relocated on another atoll when Bikini was needed for atomic experimentation? Since the administration had borne all responsibilities once charged to the paramount chief why should the United States not become paramount chief? (Mason 1954:493).

The Bikinians had observed the Americans marshal the manpower and other resources required for Operation Crossroads and their own relocation. The outcome of World War II and the nuclear experiments were still fresh in mind, and the people had clearly concluded that American power and material wealth were immeasurable. It was readily apparent to many that a substitution of the United States for the paramount chief would be advantageous to their own interests and welfare. Other Bikinians, however, feared the paramount chief's magical powers and took a more conservative stance: "We cannot take another (paramount chief) . . . nor break with him, for if we did, something very awful might happen to us" (Ibid.).

Regardless of such differences of opinion, sentiments favoring a separation from the paramount chief had strongly influenced the islanders' earlier inclination to select Kili as a possibility for resettlement. Kili was not part of any chief's domain; it had

been a commercially operated copra plantation in Japanese and German times and had passed to the United States as public domain. From the point of view emerging among the Bikinians, the atolls of Wotho, Ujae, and Lae which had been considered for relocation were deemed undesirable not only because of their small size and that they were already inhabited, but they had the additional disadvantage of being part of their paramount chief's domain.

Kwajalein Sojourn

Events of early 1948 strengthened the position of those who desired that the United States become a surrogate for the paramount chief. Three days after Mason's arrival at Rongerik, an officer of the administration arrived and was informed of the situation. A message sent to the governor urged immediate relief measures. Swift action was taken; the following day food and a medical officer were flown to Rongerik. The doctor examined the Bikinians; he pronounced their condition to be that of a starving people. On February 7 the governor arrived and outlined a plan to evacuate the islanders to a temporary camp on Kwajalein until another relocation site could be found. He proposed to subsidize the community and provide employment for those who desired it while on Kwajalein. The Bikinians responded with enthusiasm (Mason 1954:344-345), and they reaffirmed their approval of the governor's scheme when they were visited later in the month by the High Commissioner, an admiral (Richard 1957: 528). On March 14, the Bikinians loaded their possessions and delapidated canoes on board a navy vessel and arrived at Kwajalein the following day. The Rongerik resettlement had lasted two years and one week.

Kwajalein represented a totally alien environment for most Bikinians. They were given refuge on Kwajalein Island, the largest in the atoll, which had been denuded of almost all vegetation by the American invasion force of 1944. The island had a large concrete air strip, quonset huts, a variety of wooden structures, offices, churches, and tents. The lagoon side of the island was equipped with a docking area for vessels and was cluttered with

marine equipment. The military community consisted of a few thousand American males and was complete with streets, electric lights, water distilled from the sea, telephones, radios, movie theaters, and a post exchange.

On the island's ocean side was a camp of Marshallese laborers, mostly males, who were recruited from all over the archipelago. Next to the camp, a tent village of three parallel rows of ten closely spaced canvas-roofed dwellings had been constructed for the Bikinians prior to their arrival. The thirty units had corrugated metal walls and wooden floors, and each was equipped with an electric light. The quarters were cramped; each unit was about ten feet square. The arrangement of the village disrupted former residential groups. In some instances, members of a household occupied adjacent quarters, and in other cases, they were forced to separate.

The Bikinians received their meals in a messhall with the laborers. The fare was plain by American standards but appeared extravagant to the Bikinians after their Rongerik ordeal. Menus consisted of rice, canned fish, bread, beef and vegetable stew, canned fruits, milk, sugar, coffee, and tea. Outside the common mess, the Bikinians remained a community separate unto themselves. Facilities were provided for their school, council meetings, and church services.

The administration reported:

> . . . that definite psychological scars were left on the people and the first month on Kwajalein was spent chiefly in checking and restoring their health, rehabilitating their clothing and possessions, orienting them to unaccustomed surroundings, and above all, establishing a sense of security and self-respect (Richard 1957:528).

As soon as they were physically able, adults were employed as manual laborers and given tasks related to the general maintenance of the base. With their earnings, they bought clothing and sampled widely from the variety of goods available at the post exchange. Their health improved rapidly, morale soared, and they were reportedly ". . . profoundly impressed with the cultural accomplishments of the United States—movies, cokes, candy, ice cream" (Ibid.).

In contrast to the period at Rongerik, no serious problems

demanded the council's attention. Official contacts between Bikinians and Americans were frequent, but were largely maintained between chief Juda and the administration (Mason 1954:427). As individuals, the *alab* had little opportunity to exercise any of their traditional authority. The kin groups which they headed were not functional in the alien environment, and the *alab* had little to do with directing the daily activities of the community. Wages meant an unprecedented degree of economic independence for most adults. As the *alab* did not control essential resources, others were not dependent upon them. With meals and housing provided at no cost, workers were free to gratify their own wants. The traditional leaders had no customary rights to others' wages, and three or four of them who were too old for physical labor became dependent upon their younger kinsmen.

The islanders had never been more prosperous in terms of material well-being, and the satisfactions they derived from this aspect of their Kwajalein sojourn helped offset memories of Rongerik. More importantly, the Bikinians were thrust into greater contact with outsiders than at any previous time. Many of the islanders in the labor camp were among the most acculturated Marshallese; some had worked for the Japanese prior to the Americans and preferred salaried employment to life in traditional communities. Contact with the laborers served to both reinforce the negative image the Bikinians had of themselves and expose them to novel viewpoints. Compared to the laborers, the Bikinians were a group of unsophisticates and were reminded of their reputation as a backward people when one or two men from the camp were discouraged by their fellows from marrying Bikini women. At the same time, certain notions that were common among the laborers supported those of the Bikinians who were reevaluating their relationship with the paramount chief. Many laborers took a dim view of the chiefs. As they earned their livelihood outside the traditional economy, they were no longer inclined to accept a status subservient to that of the chiefs, and they questioned the traditional social order which divided islanders into privileged and commoner classes.

Contact with Americans also provided ideological grounds for reevaluating the traditional order. Some navy personnel ridiculed the idea of hereditary chiefs, and officials encouraged the

people to run their council in a democratic fashion. Enlisted personnel gave more tangible expression to the ideals which Americans are quick to espouse (if not practice in the United States) and were relatively egalitarian in their behavior and attitudes toward the Marshallese.

Within this social milieu, the Bikinians' paramount chief damaged his own interests. The chief was quite advanced in years, and he was often represented by his heir apparent. The two chiefly men demanded that the Bikinians provide domestics for a household they maintained on Kwajalein. The chief's heir paid frequent visits to the Bikinians and reportedly behaved as if he were a chief with the power and prerogatives of former times. The Bikinians resented the demands made upon them and learned from the laborers that few chiefs dared to act in such an autocratic fashion; they were advised to forget the chief and cast their lot with the Americans.

With the apparent encouragement of the laborers, the Bikinians further developed their rationale for severing their ties with the chief. Some recalled that, unlike their own ancestor Larkelon, paramount chief Kabua of the last century had not conquered Bikini by force of arms, and they claimed that they had never really been subject to him or any of his successors. They also charged that they had been denied medical care in Japanese times because the chief had failed in his obligation to assume the costs. They also found it convenient to recall that the Japanese had claimed the atoll as the property of their Emperor and had terminated whatever rights the chief might have had.

Selection of Kili

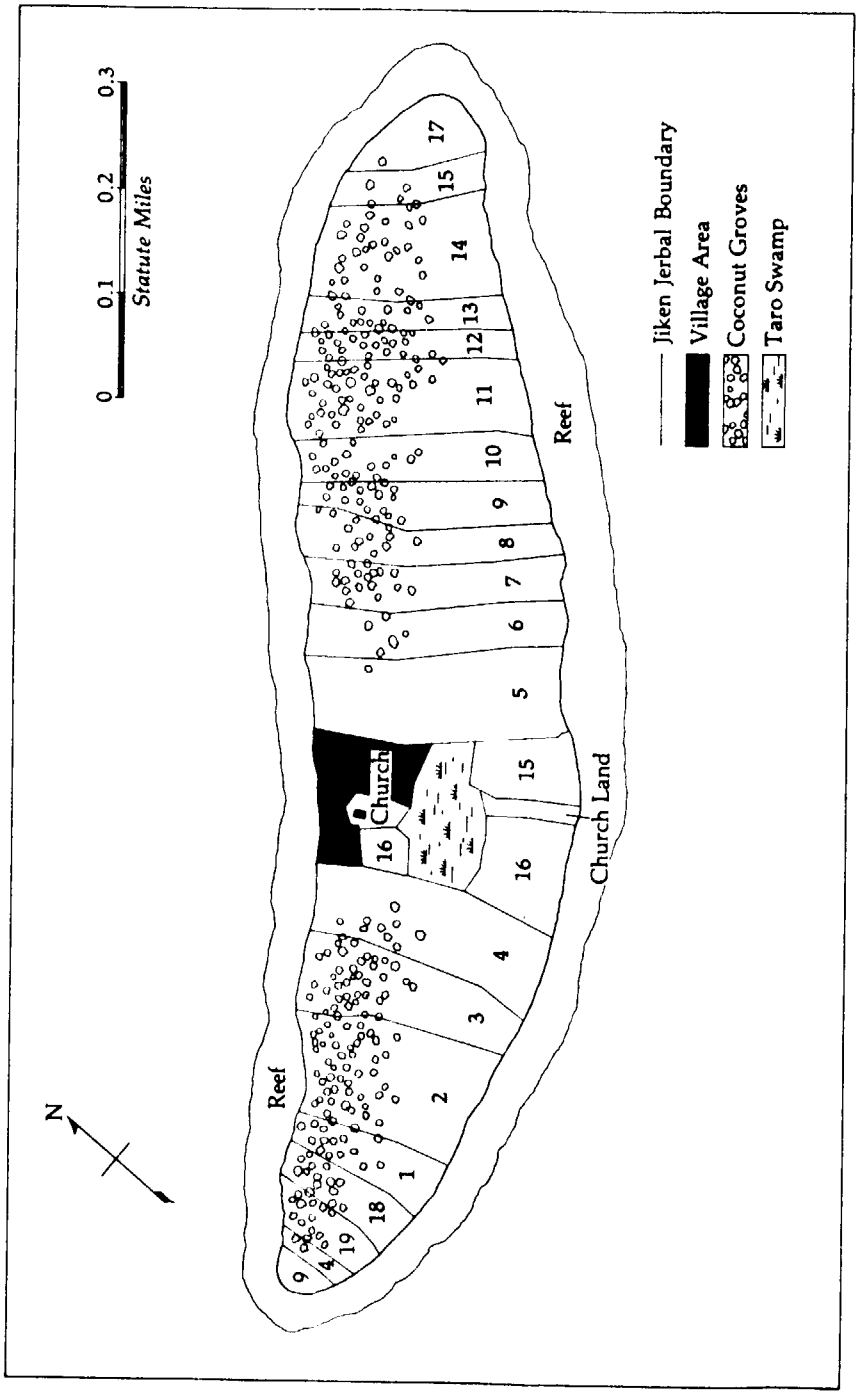
The administration began the search for another resettlement site by consulting the Bikinians' paramount chief and the chief who held Rongerik. The choice of sites was narrowed to Wotho Atoll and Kili Island. The paramount chief, not wanting to lose control over the people, urged that they be resettled within his domain on Wotho. He was told to discuss the matter with the Bikinians. The Rongerik chief was excused from further participation in the proceedings as he had interest in neither site.

In April the governor, chief Juda, three *alab*, the paramount chief, and his heir apparent flew to Wotho. Again the Bikinians were not favorably impressed. To them, Wotho was too small, and they had frequently stated that they did not wish to be settled on an atoll inhabited by others. The Wotho survey lasted less than one day.

In May Juda and ten men were taken by vessel to Kili where they were left alone to explore for two weeks. Kili has an elongate configuration with a fringing reef shelf which extends unbroken around its entire perimeter (see Map 6). The island is a little over 1.10 miles in length and averages about one-quarter mile in width. Its area of 0.36 square mile (230 acres) is about one-half the size of Bikini Island and one-sixth of Bikini Atoll's twenty-six islands. In contrast to Bikini, Kili has a rich soil cover. A depression in the island's center contains a humus-laden black muck which forms an excellent taro swamp of about 4.25 acres. Kili's soils and favorable location in the wet belt of the southern Marshalls offer considerable agricultural potential.

The quality and extent of Kili's coconut groves favorably

Plate 9. Aerial view of Kili Island from the west.



Map 6. Kili Island showing the separate land parcels. *(After a map by Leonard Mason.)*

impressed the Bikinians. The island's development as a copra plantation had begun in the 1870s when a trader purchased it from a paramount chief. Kili passed to German hands, and German, and later, Japanese plantation managers improved the plantation. By the end of the Japanese period, well-ordered rows of excellent quality coconut palms covered ninety-five percent of the island. Few pandanus trees and no arrowroot had been allowed on the plantation. Crops with which the Bikinians had little familiarity—breadfruit, papaya, banana, sweet potato, and taro—remained from the small population of about thirty islanders who had worked as laborers on the island, but these were not sufficient in quantity to support the Bikini community. As Kili had been uninhabited for four years, however, all crops were in maximum abundance when the Bikinians surveyed it.

Kili has great disadvantages. It has neither lagoon nor sheltered fishing area, and the reef shelf offers poor feeding grounds for marine life. The most abundant marine fauna are such deep water fish as tuna and bonito which are found in the open ocean around the island. Kili's long axis tends in an east-northeast to west-southwest direction, which in the absence of a lagoon, is quite unfavorable because it runs almost parallel to the northeast trades. No side of the island can be described as leeward, and there is no protected anchorage for vessels which might otherwise be used for trolling the ocean waters. The worst conditions occur from November to late spring when the tradewinds create heavy surf which isolates Kili and except for infrequent calm spells curtails fishing. In Japanese times, vessels based at Jaluit Atoll thirty miles away took advantage of such calms to make the short run to Kili to load copra and unload supplies. Carving out an existence on Kili is made even more difficult during the winter months when the season of minimal breadfruit yield coincides with the rough seas.

Skills and work habits quite different from those of the Bikinians were required on Kili. To achieve an adequate subsistence level, they would have to rely less on marine resources and take full advantage of the island's agricultural potential. Their casual attitude toward agricultural work would have to be abandoned and they would have to learn and practice the techniques required to cultivate the subsistence crops unfamiliar to them. All of these

crops, at least in their immature stages, require more attention and care than do the plants common to Bikini. The cultivation of taro is especially arduous and involves long hours of continuous back-straining labor.

The administration assumed that if the Bikinians were resettled on Kili, the palm groves would yield a coconut crop far in excess of the people's subsistence needs and that this surplus could be converted into copra and a substantial cash income for the purchase of imported foods. At the peak of the copra trade in the late 1930s, an annual average of one hundred tons of copra were produced on Kili, an amount five times greater than the maximum annual yield at Bikini. Officials thought that with efficient planning and management of resources, the Bikinians could store up a quantity of imported food against the winter season when they would be cut off from fishing and the outside world. The Bikinians, however, had little experience in trading and commercial operations and lacked the managerial and planning skills required.

Kili also offered the potential for increased contacts with the Marshallese who had had the longest contact with foreigners. Within a sixty-five mile radius of Kili are the three southernmost atolls of the Ralik chain. As noted, Jaluit, the former capital of the German and Japanese colonial governments, is only thirty miles to the northeast. Ebon, where both missionaries and traders began their activities in the 1850s, is sixty-five miles to the southwest, and Namorik is sixty miles due west. All were served by the southwestern field trip which originated at Majuro Atoll some 170 miles to the northeast in the Ratak chain. During the first years of the American administration, the southern atolls were administered from Majuro and the northern atolls from offices at Kwajalein. In the fall of 1948 Majuro became the district center from which all of the Marshalls were administered.

Thus, if the Bikinians were to make a successful adaptation to Kili, they would have to alter the entire basis of their economic system and acquire new skills and work habits. Further, the Bikinians would no longer be isolated at the farthermost ends of ship routes and distant from the center of government activity. Increased contacts with more acculturated islanders would be inevitable, and the Bikinians would be required to make an adjust-

ment to a new social environment. No one in 1948 appreciated the extent to which the islanders would have to modify their lives if Kili were chosen for resettlement.

The final choice between Kili and Wotho was to be made by a plebiscite of all adults and not by the council which had selected Rongerik. To aid the people, aerial photographs and a summary written in Marshallese outlining the advantages and disadvantages of both sites were posted in their Kwajalein village. The plebiscite was scheduled for May 25, but the people could not make up their minds and asked for a postponement. The day of decision was rescheduled for June 1. The Bikinians sought advice from officials and other Marshallese. The former discussed the two alternatives but stressed that the decision was ultimately theirs. A few Marshallese employed as interpreters felt that Kili was the better choice and they advised the Bikinians accordingly.

The people cast their votes on June 1. Two boxes were placed in a small room—one was labelled Kili and the other Wotho, and each bore a photograph and description of the designated site. Each adult was given a metal tag, entered the room alone, and dropped his or her token into the box of his choice. Kili was chosen by a vote of fifty-four to twenty-two. The factors determining the islanders' choice were the island's coconut groves and that it was outside the jurisdiction of any paramount chief. The paramount chief was displeased with the results as the future of his relationship to the people was uncertain and had not been considered (Mason 1954:355).

The governor deferred any official action until he once again examined the possibility of restoring the people to Bikini. When he assured himself that the evidence was conclusive that they could not return, he recommended their resettlement on Kili. This recommendation was approved by both the High Commissioner and the Secretary of the Navy by mid-August.

Summary and Analysis

For the American administration, the initial relocations of the Bikinians resulted in unanticipated and unwanted consequences. Because of the Americans' own inexperience in Micronesia,

they had assumed that the movement of a small population was a relatively simple matter which could be accomplished swiftly, and with little planning or difficulty. The Americans were neither prepared to comprehend the islanders' deep attachment to their ancestral homeland nor were they able to estimate the size of a population which Rongerik or any other atoll could be expected to support. Even if such matters had been understood, there is no reason to assume that they would have been given any priority over the military and scientific concerns of the United States. While local officials in the Marshalls who had the direct responsibility for the islanders' welfare evidenced real concern over the relocated people, there is little, if any, indication that decision makers in the higher echelons of government in far distant Washington, D.C. gave more than passing attention to the plight of the small community. Indeed, effective action to alleviate conditions at Rongerik occurred only after it was evident that the resettlement had totally failed and the actions of the United States in the islands had become subject to the pressures of world opinion and possible censure from the United Nations.

For the Bikinians, the period of their Rongerik and Kwajalein relocations was one of great uncertainty and anxiety. Their limited exposure to the world beyond the boundaries of their own community made them ill-prepared to cope with the circumstances they encountered. None of their leaders had any appreciable experience in dealing with outsiders, and their chief and magistrate was neither experienced nor secure in his status as head of the community. Both factors partially accounted for an absence of decisive and effective leadership during that period.

The Bikinians' refusal to accept fully the possibility that their relocation was more than a temporary measure was derived from their inability to believe or to adjust emotionally to the fact that Bikini could be lost to them forever. They were, however, well aware that their hope of returning to Bikini or their future elsewhere rested in the hands of the Americans. Their own perception of events during the period confirmed their earlier impressions of the scope of American power and material wealth, and caused many of them to conclude that it would be advantageous to have the United States become a surrogate for their paramount chief.

Throughout the period, the Bikinians were disadvantaged in their dealings with the new administration because of factors beyond their own inexperience. Americans were still unfamiliar and imposing figures in the immediate postwar years. In retrospect, it is obvious that the islanders were uncertain as to how they could best manage their relations with the foreigners to achieve their own ends. Fear of incurring the displeasure of the Americans further accounted for their indecisiveness and vacillation at both Rongerik and Kwajalein. Their own selection of Rongerik had proved disastrous, and in large part, the Bikinians' reluctance to select another site for relocation was a consequence of their hope that the Americans would assume responsibility for their future welfare.

Uncertain as to what means were available to them in their early attempts to rid themselves of the paramount chief, the Bikinians turned to their own history to reinterpret past events in ways they hoped would gain the sympathy of the Americans. The islanders' assertion that they had never been subjects of the paramount chief was clearly a reworking of history to provide a rationale for new goals. The allegations that the chief had failed to meet his obligations in the past and that the Japanese had preempted his rights to Bikini contradicted the denial of his former hegemony over them, but nonetheless, both were advanced as further evidence that he deserved no claim to their allegiance, land, or other resources.

Similarly, the Bikinians drew upon mythological accounts of the past to influence Americans. The myth pertaining to Rongerik's contamination by a malevolent spirit was not made known until after the Bikinians had encountered discomfort on the atoll and had become concerned about convincing the administration that the atoll was unsuitable for habitation and they should be returned to Bikini. Had the myth been an important part of their beliefs, it is most unlikely that it would have gone unmentioned prior to their actual resettlement on Rongerik.

One event at Rongerik may have been an attempt by a desperate people to initiate some direct action to end the settlement and effect a return home. As noted, the origin of the fire which destroyed thirty percent of the trees on the main island was never determined. With the possible exception of blazes caused by the

military invasions of World War II, fires of comparable magnitude are not known to have occurred elsewhere in the Marshalls. Thus, it seems reasonable to suggest that the Rongerik fire was either kindled or, more likely, allowed to spread as a dramatic means of attracting American attention and concern.

Events of the period, however, did provide the Bikinians with the opportunity to acquire greater experience in dealing with Americans. The degree and kind of contact with Americans was different for various segments of the community. All Bikinians observed Americans in the context of official visits and public meetings held to explain administration proposals. Direct intercourse with officials, however, was limited to relatively few Bikinians. At Rongerik, the members of the council were most directly involved in the negotiations with officials. At both Rongerik and Kwajalein, four of the councilmen had more extensive contact with the administration than did their fellows. One of the four was Juda, who, because of his dual role as hereditary chief and magistrate, was most directly involved with officials. He alone was taken to Bikini to view the results of the first nuclear test, he led the contingent of Bikini men who were part of the survey parties which later examined Bikini and evaluated potential sites for relocation, and he served as the principal link in the administration's line of communication with the community at Kwajalein. Juda's conspicuous role not only gave him considerable experience with Americans, but the continued recognition and support as head of the community by officials as well as his fame as "King of Bikini" generated by the news media enhanced his position and provided him with a greater prominence among his fellows than he had previously enjoyed.

The other three men who played conspicuous roles during the period were those who accompanied Juda on the second reconnaissance of Bikini and the surveys of potential sites for relocation. Two of the three already occupied prominent positions in the community and the reasons they were delegated such important responsibilities appear obvious. One was *alab B* who, as head of the second ranking Ijjirik lineage, was subordinate only to Juda in the traditional power structure of the community. The other, Lokwiar's son, the scribe, was second in authority to Juda within the framework of the council organization. Reasons

for the third male's participation in the survey parties are not so apparent. He, *alab M*, headed the junior of the two large Makaoliej lineages. He had had some brief experience with Americans at Kwajalein after the war (Mason 1954:306), and as a consequence, may have been deemed more qualified than others for the task. Whatever the reasons for the latter's inclusion in the survey parties, all three men who accompanied Juda acquired more familiarity with American officials than their fellows and gained greater influence as important molders of opinion in the community.

With the exception of these four men, most of the traditional leaders experienced some eclipse of their former statuses in community affairs. Perhaps the Bikinians had lost some confidence in their leaders at Rongerik because they had been responsible for selecting the atoll for relocation. More certainly, the Kwajalein sojourn diminished the traditional power and influence of the *alab*. Because they had no authority over resources at the military base, many of their younger kinsmen became economically independent for the first time. In addition, the Bikinians as a group were exposed to both Americans and the Marshallese of the labor camp who openly challenged traditional authority. As a collective body, the council, the *alab*, lost control of community affairs when the administration neither gave them real responsibilities at Kwajalein nor entrusted them with the selection of a site for their third relocation. Thus, by the end of the Kwajalein relocation, there were some indications that alterations were occurring in the traditional power and authority structure of the community.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Kili Resettlement: 1948–1954

Founding the Settlement

In late September, 1948 two vessels carrying an advance party of twenty-four Bikini men and eight Seabees under the command of a navy officer arrived at Kili. Because of rough seas and Kili's reef, the vessels could not be anchored near the shore. Over a period of twelve days, lumber, tarpaper roofing, concrete, tools, and other material for constructing a village had to be ferried ashore by rafts. An area was cleared on the north side of the island where the dwellings of the plantation laborers had formerly stood. During October tent shelters, two concrete cisterns, and four permanent buildings—a store, copra warehouse, medical dispensary, and council house—were erected.

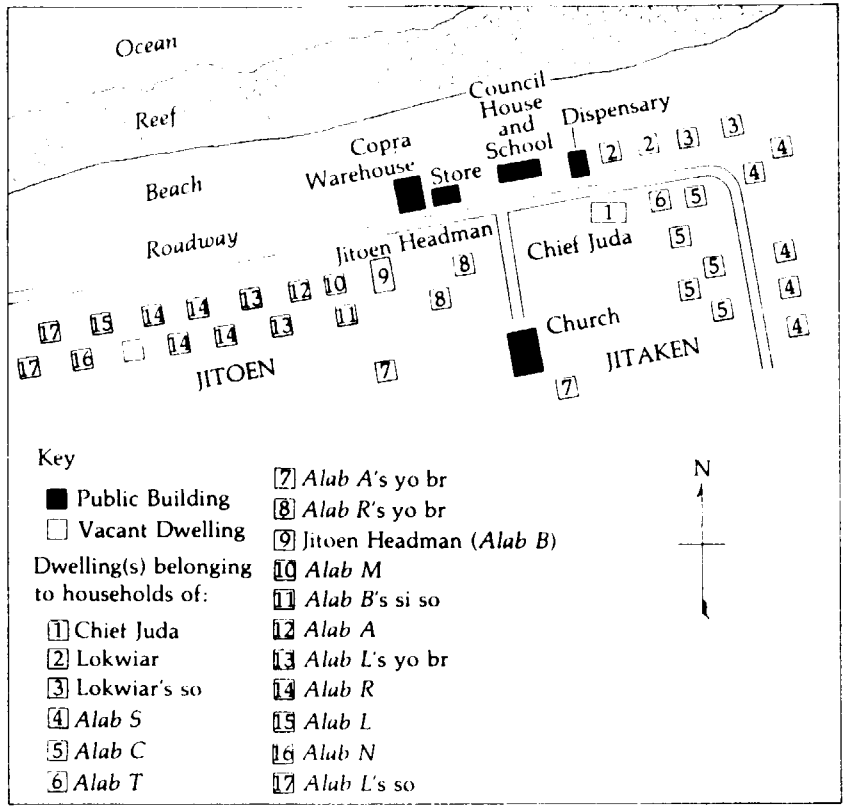
On November 2 two vessels arrived bearing the rest of the community. The islanders had only their personal possessions; their canoes had further deteriorated at Kwajalein and had been abandoned as worthless. Kili's reef again hampered operations; rough seas and hazardous landing conditions allowed only a few people to reach shore, and the vessels proceeded to Jaluit and the shelter of its lagoon. Three days later the seas subsided; the vessels made a dash to Kili, and unloading was completed. On November 11 the vessels and all navy personnel were returned to Kwajalein, except for a carpenter's mate who remained to supervise the construction of permanent dwellings. The Kwajalein episode had lasted a little over seven months.

Among the first tasks confronting the Bikinians were the construction of dwellings, clearing of dense overgrowth that had engulfed the palm groves and taro swamp since their abandonment, and a rigorous program of planting subsistence crops. Building a village came first, and the administration provided two months' food supply to facilitate progress. The people worked hard during the first months on the island as they concentrated on building their new homes. When the carpenter's mate left in May, 1949, a total of thirty-five dwellings, nine more than at Bikini or Rongerik, were completed as well as a church and more cisterns.

A redistribution of power, influence, and privilege that was to occur in the community was foreshadowed as the islanders settled into their new homes. The Americans provided the settlement plan, as they had at Rongerik. Houses were arranged in a compact L-shaped pattern. Most were situated along a main roadway, the long leg of the L, paralleling Kili's north shore for a little over 250 yards. Others were located on the 75-yard short leg of the L, which runs inland at a right angle to the north shore forming the east side of the village. Within the right-angle of the L-shaped village plan is a dune-like structure or hill which rises abruptly to about 40 feet. The church was positioned on the hilltop facing the north shore and the main roadway. A path which runs downhill from the church and intersects the main roadway at a right angle became established as the boundary between the two village districts when the dwellings were constructed (see Map 7).

The houses were built in stages. In the first stage, several were built to the east of the intersection, and this area became known as Jitaken 'upwind, to the east'. In the second stage, a few houses were built in the area west of the intersection, and it became Jitoen 'downwind, to the west'. The procedure was twice repeated until sixteen dwellings were located in Jitaken and eighteen in Jitoen. Another house, the thirty-fifth, was placed on the hill near the church for the pastor (Mason 1954: 451-452).

As the dwellings were completed, Juda and the council allotted them to family units. The factors which determined residential assignments are not certain. In some cases, families



Map 7. Kili village, 1949. *(After a map by Leonard Mason.)*

which had formerly lived next to one another received adjacent dwellings, and in other instances they did not. In contrast to the eleven households at Bikini and the twelve at Rongerik, seventeen were formed on Kili through the fission of some of the former units.

In part the increase of the number of households could be attributed to the greater number of available dwellings and an increase in the population. The number of Bikinians on Kili in the winter of 1948-49 had grown to 208 (Ibid.:435). Medicines from the dispensary had reduced the high infant mortality rate, and Kili's coconut groves had attracted some of the islanders who had been absent from Bikini in 1946. Most of these returned expatriates had been living at Kwajalein and in the northern Ralik;

none of the large contingent of Bikinians at Ailinglablab were drawn to Kili.

Other factors, however, appear to have been important in establishing the increased number of households. None of the three pairs of brothers who had formed joint sibling families at Bikini reestablished common households at Kili. Other new households were established by Lokwiar's son who had formerly resided with his father, and by two males who had resided with households headed by their wives' fathers.[1] In the past, these men had had no alternative but to affiliate with the household of one of the *alab* since the latter had controlled all land. Residential choices, however, were no longer constrained by considerations of land rights, and the creation of these new households further eroded the traditional authority of the several *alab*.

Changes in residential alignments were also a major factor in the rise to a position of greater importance by Juda's second in command, *alab B*, the head of the second ranking Ijjirik lineage. At Bikini he had been subordinate to Juda for reasons of residence and lineage rank. On Bikini, the households of *alab B* and Juda were in the same district and section, (see Chapter Four and Map 5, page 69) and he had been subordinate to Juda in district, section, and community affairs. In addition to the prominence he had gained because of his role in the surveys of proposed relocation sites, *alab B* had emerged as an important figure in Rongerik overseeing part of the communal distribution system. With the Kili resettlement, he further enhanced his position in community affairs. During the construction of the village, Juda took the first dwelling completed in Jitaken, where Lokwiar was also given housing. Later, *alab B* was established in Jitoen. As the highest ranking Ijjirik male and Juda's heir apparent, as well as on the strength of his forceful personality, he was

[1] As described in Chapter Four, the younger brother of *alab A* had established his own household at Rongerik. The other two men who had formerly resided with their elder brothers' domestic groups and became household heads on Kili were younger brothers of *alab L* and *R*. The two males who had resided in households headed by their wives' fathers were one of *alab L*'s sons and one of *alab B*'s maternal nephews. These are reflected in Map 7.

soon recognized as the district's headman. Hereafter, he may be referred to as the Jitoen headman.

Juda headed his own Jitaken district and remained in his dual capacity as chief and magistrate. He continued to function as the community's principal spokesman with outsiders, and in 1949, he was summoned by the administration to represent the Bikinians at a conference of atoll magistrates at the district center at Majuro. By the following year, there was evidence that he was secure in his position as the head of the community; he was elected by his fellows to represent them in the newly created Marshall Islands Congress.[2]

The other two men who had gained importance from their roles in the relocations continued to be prominent in community affairs. During the initial years on Kili, Lokwiar's son remained in the office of council scribe. Afterwards, he voluntarily relinquished the position, and the Makaoliej *alab M* was elected to fill the post. Lokwiar's son remained a man of considerable influence, however; his household was in Juda's Jitaken district, and he served the chief as confidant and advisor.

The First Five Years

The communal organization that had developed at Rongerik continued for the first five and one-half years on Kili. This system was advantageous when concentrated effort was required for the construction of the village. Afterwards, two or three days a week were set aside for communal labor. The council met on these mornings and divided all able-bodied men into groups for clearing brush from the groves, opening trails, weeding the taro swamp, and planting pandanus and breadfruit. Copra making, when scheduled, proceeded throughout the week and was not limited to communal workdays. At the urging of the administration, the lone Bikinian who had long resided on Ebon Atoll returned to the community to instruct the people in the techniques for drying copra in the wetter southern islands.

[2] The Marshall Islands Congress began in 1950 as a largely advisory body. In more recent years, it has assumed more legislative functions (see Meller 1969).

Few difficulties and no subsistence problems were experienced during the first months on Kili. Crops were collected and distributed under the council's direction. Local resources, food provided by the administration, and copra receipts were divided among the households in shares proportionate to their relative sizes. In order to provide easier access to the island, a navy demolition team dynamited a shallow channel through Kili's fringing reef a short distance west of the village. Small craft could negotiate the channel when seas were calm, but it proved of little use during rough surf conditions. Nonetheless, all seemed to go well, and officials believed that the resettlement was off to a good start and the problem of providing a secure future for the Bikinians was being resolved.

Plate 10. Channel in the reef which surrounds Kili Island, taken during calm sea and low tide, 1963. *(Photo by author.)*

Plate 11. Bikini men attempting to negotiate the channel during the rough seas of winter months, 1964. *(Photo by author.)*

As at Rongerik, such early optimism was premature: a number of setbacks were soon encountered. A shortage of vessels in the entire Trust Territory caused field trip ships to lag far behind schedule, and the islanders were unable to trade their copra for food and other supplies.[3] When vessels did attempt to call, stor-

[3] During the time (more than a quarter century) that the United States has administered the Trust Territory, inadequate funding and poor planning have accounted for the unreliable field trip service in the Marshalls. Some

IX

The Kili Development Project

Launching the Project

The immediate consequence of the land division—that each of the *bamli* began to clear its land and produce copra—was precisely what the administration had desired. The islanders' response also helped to launch the Kili Development Project on a positive course. As defined by the Americans, the project's goals were to: (1) clear the coconut groves of brush and increase copra production; (2) provide instruction in agricultural techniques; (3) stimulate the production and sale of handicraft; and (4) develop a cooperative to manage trading operations. Mr. Milne, the project manager, had two assistants: a man from Kusaie in the Eastern Carolines who was a taro specialist and a Marshallese woman skilled as a handicraft instructor.

Milne soon developed a good personal relationship with Juda who encouraged his people to work with the project team. In cooperation with the council, Milne organized, scheduled, and supervised work activities. Taro, banana, pandanus, breadfruit, papaya, and sweet potato cuttings were imported from Kusaie Island and Ebon and Jaluit Atolls. Men were organized into work teams and began to develop the taro swamp. Milne and the Kusaien taught them how to plant, mulch, and care for unfamiliar crops. The most productive methods of coconut palm cultivation were also introduced; the Bikinians were instructed in the reasons and necessity for keeping the groves free of brush, and they learned why the proper spacing of trees ensured a maximal yield.

Within five months, substantial progress was evident. The

anthropologist, Saul Riesenberg, visited Kili in June, 1954, and reported ". . . it is obvious that the people have worked hard under the manager's direction, and the results are obvious to the eye everywhere" (Riesenberg 1954). Part of the swamp was cleared and planted. The planting of other crops was greatly increased. For the first time, a number of people, including Juda and three or four of the Bikini *alab*, indicated they were willing to remain on Kili if progress continued to be made.

The majority of the islanders, however, remained pessimistic. At least three of the Bikini *alab* withheld their support and led a group of dissidents which dampened the morale and optimism of others. The dissidents were skeptical and critical of efforts to improve their lot on Kili. From their point of view, the success of the relocation was the Americans' responsibility, and the United States owed them wages for their work with the project.

Riesenberg judged that the project was at a critical stage, and that with further support and encouragement, a greater number of people would adopt a more positive attitude. In his opinion, the negative attitude expressed by most of the people was at least based partially on the assumption that the Americans would do more for Kili if they could be made to feel responsible and guilty for the Bikinians' unfortunate plight. He concluded:

> In other words, consciously or not, they are trying to place themselves in an advantageous bargaining position. An improvement in the general prosperity of Kili as a result of the development project may cause mitigation of this negativism. In any case, the project would seem to be a last chance for Kili, and is so viewed by some of the people; if it fails, they feel the only remaining recourse is to move elsewhere (Ibid.).

The district administration concurred that maximum effort should be made to support the project. To ensure that the people had an adequate food supply until they realized a harvest from their labor, local resources were supplemented by an issue of C-rations. In August the first of three special field trips was arranged to obtain more plantings from Kusaie. District anthropologist, Jack Tobin, accompanied Milne and a number of Bikinians on the trip. They returned to Kili with 6,000 taro cuttings and large quantities of breadfruit, banana, and other plants.

votes in the 1948 plebiscite had been miscounted had now been transformed: some individuals contended that the Americans had deliberately rigged the entire affair.

Summary and Analysis

The Kili Development Project had few of the consequences that the Americans had intended. The Bikinians committed themselves to developing Kili's agricultural potential only when they had little hope of another relocation and when their efforts were guided by outside supervision. What had been accomplished during the project was negated by damage and discouragement from natural disasters, the withdrawal of supervisory personnel, and the islanders' continuing desire to return to Bikini or to be resettled elsewhere.

The administration initiated the project as an attempt to help the people achieve a satisfactory adjustment to their new home and to end problems that had resulted from their relocations. At the same time it is clear that during the latter part of the project, the administration was responding to the threat of embarrassment and pressure exerted by the United Nations Trusteeship Council. The administration had little alternative but to mobilize the effort required for the fulfillment of commitments made to the United Nations. The American effort to assist the Bikinians was thus largely a consequence of external forces as it was in the earlier period at Rongerik.

The Kili Development Project also reinforced the Bikinians' notion that the United States should assume the responsibility for their welfare and had the resources to do so. The provision of manpower and other resources required by the project (vessels, radio equipment, housing at Jaluit, etc.) served as further demonstration of what the Americans could do when they desired. Other welfare measures implemented after the project's termination, the Bikinians' experiences at Kwajalein, and their awareness of the United States missile and space technology represented still more dramatic evidence of the magnitude of American power and resources, and reaffirmed the Bikinians' earlier conclusion that it was to their advantage to attach themselves firmly to the Americans.

From the Bikinians' point of view, one major goal was achieved during the project. To them, the agreement with the United States represented an end to their subordinate status vis-a-vis the paramount chief. As he had no legal or traditional claim to Kili, he had no right to their services or resources, and in their eyes, a significant victory had been won.

The financial compensation awarded the islanders increased their ability to purchase imported foods and material items. This in turn increased the people's desire for a wider range of goods, a process that had begun early in their relocations, and made them more dependent upon the Americans and the outside world. At the same time, the Bikinians' income gave them less incentive to engage in the production of copra and handicraft as a means of satisfying their wants.

By the later 1950s and early 1960s, the experience that the people had acquired since their initial relocation and the corresponding improvement in their own self-image gave them a greater confidence in themselves. These changes in the people's attitudes were manifest in their assertiveness in making numerous petitions to the administration and the strong stance taken by Juda and others in dealings with Americans. The Bikinians were no longer the meek and uncertain islanders who had readily acquiesced to the Americans' request for their relocation a decade and a half earlier.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Return to Bikini

Responding to the Bikinians' failure to adjust to Kili and their pleas to be returned to their homeland, in the late 1960s the High Commissioner persuaded officials in Washington, D.C. to determine the condition of Bikini. The atoll on which no nuclear tests had been conducted since 1957 was examined by Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) scientists. In August, 1968 the President of the United States announced that with the exception of a few small islands, radiation levels were low enough that most of the atoll was safe for human habitation (U.S. Department of State 1968:304). The Bikinians were elated with the news, and shortly thereafter, several of them accompanied the High Commissioner, other officials, and a corps of newsmen on a reconnaissance of Bikini. The event was given wide coverage by the news media, and the Bikinians once again appeared in the pages of newspapers and magazines throughout the world.

The Bikinians' elation was dampened by what they saw. Bikini was not the idyllic homeland of their memories. A massive amount of debris and equipment left from the tests cluttered the islands and beaches. As a result of the nuclear experiments, two or three small islands and portions of others had disappeared. Most coconut palms and other plants of economic value had been removed or destroyed, and the atoll was engulfed by a dense layer of scrub vegetation.

Unfortunately, chief Juda who had led the community through the troubled years since relocation did not survive to learn that Bikini would be returned to his people; he died a few

Plate 15. Aerial view of Bikini Island, Bikini Atoll from the west, 1964. The lagoon is to right, and the ocean is in the foreground and horizon. All palm trees are gone; only scrub vegetation remains. *(Photo by Leonard Mason.)*

months before the Presidential announcement. Juda's son succeeded as head of his *bamli,* but the chief's death opened another chapter in the competition for power and influence in the community. The head of the junior Ijjirik lineage renewed his claim that Juda had never been the legitimate chief. From his point of view, the time had come for the rectification of past injustices, and because he was of superior generational standing within the structure of the Ijjirik sub-clan, he claimed the right to succeed to the chieftainship. Predictably, and as Juda and Lokwiar had done in earlier years, the Jitoen headman also claimed the chieftainship because he was a member of the senior ranking Ijjirik lineage.[1]

By 1968 both aspirants to the chieftainship were quite old. Because of their age and past self-assertiveness, neither had the confidence of their fellow islanders. The office of magistrate provided an alternative that had not been available in the past. The

[1] Like Juda, two more of the *alab* did not survive to learn of their impending return home. One was Kili *alab d,* the head of a type-one *bamli* who was succeeded by his son. The second, *alab C,* was one of the old Bikini *alab* who headed a type-two *bamli.* More than a year after his death, its members had yet to select a successor. With the deaths of Juda and *alab C,* only four of the eleven Bikini *alab* remained.

Bikinians thus elected Lokwiar's son to succeed Juda as magistrate and left the dispute over the chieftainship unresolved.

Rehabilitating Bikini

Officials of the Trust Territory, AEC, and agencies of the Department of Defense (DOD) planned the rehabilitation of Bikini in a two-phase program. First, the AEC and DOD had the relatively short-term but huge task of removing radioactive materials, other debris, and scrub vegetation, and in so far as possible, restoring the natural topography of islands. The Trust Territory assumed the responsibility for the second phase of the program involving the longer range tasks of replanting the atoll, constructing housing, and relocating the community. The two phases were to overlap since replanting was to commence with the removal of scrub vegetation.

Eniu, the second largest island in the atoll located south of the main island on the reef's eastern rim (see Map 3, page 17), was selected as the base of initial operations because it had an airstrip constructed during the test period. By early 1969 a tent village with an electrical power plant, a water distillation system, and a number of other modern conveniences were established on the island and weekly air service to Kwajalein was initiated. A task force of men outfitted with heavy equipment, a variety of vehicles, and LST's of World War II vintage began the cleanup operation. In June eight Bikini men were flown to the atoll to aid with the work.

It was projected that the actual resettlement would be accomplished over a period of eight or more years to allow for the maturation of newly planted palms and other subsistence crops. According to the administration's plan, work crews of men from Kili were to begin the planting under the direction of the Marshall Islands District Agricultural Department. The crews were to be employed by the administration and rotated every three months between Bikini and Kili so that men would not be separated from their families for extended periods of time. At an unspecified date, family units would gradually be relocated until the entire community was returned. Buildings were to be constructed of concrete block and aluminum roofing to avoid the same deterior-

ation that had occurred on Kili. As an interim measure, $95,000 was budgeted to purchase materials for the renovation of the Kili village. The cost of the overall project was estimated at a sum far in excess of three million dollars.

By the time of my research in the summer months of 1969, much of the enthusiasm that had been generated by their projected return home had been dissipated, community morale was low, and the Bikinians were displeased with the rehabilitation program. The number of islanders on Kili had increased to 344; the birth rate remained unchecked, and relatives who had long been absent were returning. The increased population was more than the island could support, and the winter months of 1968-69 had been one of the worst the people had experienced. As in the past, on more than one occasion rough seas had prevented the landing of cargo. The USDA surplus foods had not been sufficient to tide the community over, the Cooperative's resources had been exhausted and it was bankrupt. Once again, before relief provisions were landed in the spring, the people had been reduced to a diet of immature coconuts.

As in earlier years, the Bikinians evoked the "milk and honey" image of Bikini and reiterated the hardships they had endured on Kili. After the much publicized announcement of their return home, they were dismayed that they had to remain on Kili for a few years to come. Many wanted to return to Bikini immediately and have the administration subsist them until newly planted trees matured. Those men who were and would be employed in the replanting program were demanding wages higher than those normally paid to agricultural laborers. The people were also not satisfied with the plans for renovating the Kili village. Consistent with the stance they had taken in the past, they rejected the administration's assumption that they would provide the labor to rebuild their houses and insisted upon payment for their efforts.

The Bikinians, however, were hampered in their efforts to deal with the administration, because of the lack of strong leadership that Juda had provided, and because of the internal struggles for power which had divided the community into opposing factions. Each of the aspirants to the chieftainship had his own coterie of followers. Neither was supporting the new magistrate, and there was some indication that one of them was actively attempting to undermine the magistrate's authority as the head of

the community. The administration was either unaware or unconcerned about the dispute over the chieftainship and officials were dealing with the community through the new magistrate just as they had formerly done with Juda. The magistrate was attempting to develop his own base of power and authority through his status as a Bikini *alab*, his prestige as Lokwiar's son, the prominence gained by his role in the community's relocations, and the support he was now receiving from officials as magistrate.

In August, 1969 the first shipment of seed nuts was taken to Bikini and the Bikinians there began the planting program under the supervision of the Marshalls' district agriculturalist. The cleanup phase of the program was completed in October. AEC, military personnel, and much of their equipment were withdrawn from the operation, the weekly air service to Kwajalein was terminated, and the program was turned over to the Trust Territory. A special representative of the district administrator with experience in tropical agriculture was appointed to supervise the work at Bikini. A crew of twenty-three workers from Kili and a second load of seed nuts arrived at the atoll in December.

Phase two of the rehabilitation has been marked by serious logistical problems which have impeded the program, and by the Bikinians' attempts to gain further financial compensation and other concessions from the Americans. The Bikinians' long standing concern over the amount of their interest payments was exacerbated when they learned that the displaced Enewetok people were to receive a substantial financial award. The Enewetok people had remained on Ujelang since their resettlement there in 1947 (see Chapter Four). Like the Bikinians, they have always sustained the hope of returning to their homeland, and they too had received a trust fund as financial compensation. The impending return of the Bikinians to their homeland caused great unrest among the Enewetok people, and they protested their continued alienation from Enewetok. In an effort to pacify them, "undisclosed agencies" of the United States government provided them with an *ex gratia* payment of $1,020,000 in 1969, and the funds were invested for the community.[2] This action further convinced the

[2] In April, 1972 officials in Washington, D.C. announced that Enewetok Atoll would be returned to its people no later than the end of 1973. Recent events indicate, however, that the actual date will be much later.

Bikinians that their settlement with the United States was inadequate. They renewed their appeals for an increase in their trust fund, and some suggested that they should demand restitution for Bikini land which had been damaged or destroyed.

Action soon followed, and during the winter of 1969-70 the Bikinians petitioned the High Commissioner for an immediate return to Bikini and further compensation in the amount of $100,000,000 for damages done to the atoll and the discomforts they had endured as a consequence of their relocation (Letter to High Commissioner from Kili Magistrate, December 14, 1969). In April, 1970 administration officials travelled to Kili to explain why the resettlement could not take place for a number of years. As an interim measure, the people were assured that every effort will be made " . . . to make living conditions on Kili more pleasant until Bikini is fit for habitation" (*Micronitor*, Vol. 1, No. 25, 1970). The sum of $10,000 was provided to reestablish the Cooperative, and Bikini men were employed by the administration to renovate the Kili village.

Not satisfied with the administration's responses to their requests, the Bikinians contacted the offices of a law firm on Guam in the summer of 1970 to explore the advantages of obtaining legal counsel. During the same period the workers at Bikini went on strike because they were dissatisfied with working conditions and believed that the task of clearing the atoll from debris was inadequately done. The strike was settled, but details are not available (*Micronitor* Vol. 1, Nos. 16 and 24, 1970).[3] In the fall of 1970 it was reported that almost every able-bodied adult male was employed by the administration to further the rehabilitation efforts at both Kili and Bikini. Shortly thereafter, the entire community was placed on a long-term relief food program.

Concern and disappointment over progress at Bikini, however, offset the satisfactions gained from these welfare efforts. While certain members of the Marshalls district administration, particularly those of the Agriculture Department, worked diligently in

[3] On more than one occasion, Marshallese stevedores have gone on strike at Majuro, and they may have served as an example which inspired the Bikinians to employ this tactic. I have no concrete data pertaining to the Bikinians' decision to seek legal counsel.

the effort to make the atoll habitable, it was obvious that phase two of the project was neither progressing well nor receiving the full support of the higher levels of the Territory administration. For several months in 1970 and 1971, the only available vessel for transportation between the base camp at Eniu and Bikini Island and pickup trucks for moving men, equipment, and seed nuts were frequently out of repair. Because of erratic shipping and the termination of the air service with Kwajalein, supplies and wages for the workers arrived behind schedule. Several appeals to the Office of the High Commissioner for logistic support and for the services of a mechanic went unheeded. The program proceeded at a snail's pace, but the replanting of Bikini and Eniu islands was eventually completed. Plans for replanting other islands in the atoll are vague or nonexistent.

The Bikinians' first attempt to obtain legal counsel was unsuccessful. To press their claims for additional compensation and to expedite the project at Bikini, they began to explore the possibility of obtaining assistance from the Micronesian Legal Services Corporation (MLSC), an action-oriented agency established in the Territory in 1971 and funded by the Office of Economic Opportunity. In May, 1973 the Directing Attorney for the MLSC in the Marshalls petitioned the President of the United States to review the history and current status of the Bikinians.[4]

In the fall of 1973 the administration announced that housing on Bikini was nearly completed, and, "If all is acceptable to the people, the Trust Territory government is prepared to allow them to return to Bikini Atoll permanently by Christmas this year" (*Highlights* October 15, 1973). Thus, it appears that the original plan for phase two of the rehabilitation project has been significantly altered, and that the administration intends to return the people to Bikini long before coconuts or other crops have matured. Such a course of action will inevitably require that the community continue to be subsidized for years to come.[5]

[4] The Directing Attorney received no response from officials in Washington, D.C.

[5] In spite of the Trust Territory's optimistic announcement, the Bikinians were not returned to their homeland in late 1973. The construction of hous-

Reevaluating Kili

The islanders' impending return to Bikini has caused some to reappraise Kili and the Jaluit lands. They are uncertain that they want to return to the remote atoll and indicate that they may prefer to remain on Kili. The latter alternative would be particularly attractive if the majority of people return to Bikini and leave Kili's copra resources for a relatively few. Younger islanders who have been born and raised on Kili are not familiar with lagoon fishing, sailing, or life on an atoll and some express reservations about abandoning the only home they have ever known.

Regardless of the ambivalence of some, all of the islanders want to maintain possession of Kili and the Jaluit lands. With regard to the former, they strongly believe that they have made too great an investment in the island to consider relinquishing it, and for all of its disadvantages, its coconut groves are admittedly of great value. While no actual use is being made of the Jaluit lands, the people's desire to keep them is just another reflection of their generalized concern over land.

Whether or not the Bikinians will retain Kili and the Jaluit lands is uncertain. The 1956 agreement with the United States provided the islanders with only full-use rights to the land until they are returned to Bikini (see Appendix). The administration has remained silent on the issue, and it appears that the future disposition of Kili and the Jaluit lands will be determined through negotiation.[6]

The return of Bikini to the people, the possibility of keeping Kili and the Jaluit lands, and the hope that further financial compensation may be forthcoming has roused the interests of those islanders who have long been absent from the community.

ing was not completed in time. Other factors contributing to the delay are unknown, and as this study goes to press no firm date for the Bikinians' return to their atoll has been set.

[6] As in earlier years, negotiations with Americans are conducted through interpreters, a procedure with great potential for misunderstanding. A few younger Bikinians have acquired a fair command of English through the school system, but very few individuals over thirty years of age are fluent in the foreign language.

Shortly after the 1968 Presidential announcement, some of the expatriates began to reestablish their ties by returning to their relatives on Kili, and thus helped increase the number of islanders on Kili to 344. Despite the return of some, the number of relatives on other atolls had continued to increase to a total of 196 by new births and additional marriages to other islanders. Thus, by 1969 the total number of individuals who could claim some right to Bikini had risen to 540, more than twice the number in 1946 (see Tables 3.1 to 3.4, pages 39-42).

The trend has continued; more expatriates, their descendants, and their relatives have joined the community on Kili, and in 1973, the island's population numbered over 400.

The Paramount Chief

Predictably, the return of Bikini has rekindled the paramount chief's interest in the atoll. He never accepted the Americans' offer of financial compensation for his loss of Bikini, and in terms of Marshallese tradition and the policies of the successive colonial governments in the islands, he can claim that the atoll is a legitimate part of his domain. To date, the chief has remained in the background and has made no demands for restoration of his former rights. He is, however, attempting to gather support from among the expatriates, particularly those who settled on Ailinglablab Atoll. While the extent of his success is uncertain, it is known that some of the expatriates who have joined the community on Kili include members of the Ailinglablab group. They are currently attempting to persuade others to accept once again the paramount chief's hegemony over them.

Having ended their subordinate status to the chief, it is certain that the majority of Bikinians will reject his efforts to regain his former position. The chief has little to offer them, and the people view him as a potential drain on their resources. They have cast their lot with the United States.

Recent political developments, however may threaten Bikinians' dependence upon the United States. In response to pressures from the United Nations and growing Micronesian criticisms of the American administration of the Trust Territory, in 1969

the United States began negotiations with Micronesians to determine the future political status of the islands. It appears that Micronesia will eventually choose between two alternatives: a Micronesian nation joined in free association with the United States or independence. Although no final agreements have been reached, it appears that under the first alternative, Micronesia would be self-governing in internal affairs. The United States would provide financial support and manage international affairs. In return, Micronesian lands would be available to the United States for the development of military bases and strategic facilities (Wenkam and Baker 1970:168). An independent state, however, would have no guarantees of economic assistance.

While the future political status of the Trust Territory is uncertain, there is little doubt that in the not too distant future Micronesians will assume the responsibility of managing at least their own domestic affairs. When this occurs, the American agencies upon which the Bikinians have become so dependent will be withdrawn from the islands. There is no reason to assume that a newly formed Micronesian government will feel obliged to take on responsibility for the Bikinians' welfare and continued rehabilitation of Bikini Atoll. The Bikini situation is viewed as a problem that Americans have created and for which Americans are entirely responsible. At the same time, the Bikinians have no long-term commitment from the United States, and they may be forced to fall back upon themselves.

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