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Aboard USS Mt McKinley
9 August 1946

CLASSIFICATION CANCELLED OR CHANGED TO ----- BY: AUTHORITY OF DOE/DPC RAYMOND A. CARPENTER REVIEWED BY DATE 6-23-78

Memorandum to Brigadier General K. D. Nichols

1. As of today I am not sure whether or not tomorrow will find me enroute to the US, so that I felt it advisable to write this memo just in case my recommendation is disapproved and I am directed to stay here more or less indefinitely.

2. It appears probable from the instructions given me that your office is not convinced that the Navy B plus five report will be complete enough to suit your purposes. I have read it over, and also read over the detailed report of the DSM that was used as a basis for the report in question. I am convinced that it will be some time before it is possible to get a more complete picture of the damage done than is contained in the subject report until such time as the radiological safety section will permit extensive diving. Since the B plus five report is to be on its way to you tomorrow by courier, I believe that I cannot at the moment be of any further use out here in collecting damage information.

3. No survey of damage yet prepared is as yet complete. The bottom of the lagoon seems to have absorbed a heavy dosage of radioactivity and it does not seem to be decreasing. It is impossible to put divers on the bottom for any length of time around the ships that have been sunk, and there has been little effort to survey hull damage of ships like the New York and the Pensacola for somewhat the same reason. The divers get their daily allowable doses before they have had a chance to accomplish much.

4. This business of severe radioactivity has prompted Colonel Warren to advise that we discontinue all activity in the lagoon until it is possible to improve our control by importing new groups of monitors who are willing to stay till the job is done, and by establishing stronger safety rules. He also has demanded the setting up of a change ship where workers can shower after leaving the job, just as they are required to in our hot plants in the District. He has also instituted a stricter requirement on the use of film badges which has cut working parties down to a size he can better care for with his present organization. All of this has resulted in a serious slowing down of activity, but Admiral Blandy would not go along with Warren's recommendation to close out altogether. He insists on continuing a program of decontamination no matter how long it may take.

5. Admiral Solberg's plan for activity from now on to carry out Blandy's desires takes the following shape:

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SECRET

Memo to Brigadier General Nichols (Contd)

a. Concentrate on recovery of instruments (they hope to have them all recovered that can be recovered by the end of next week)

b. Put greatest decontamination effort on ships for test Charlie (five capital ships and five subs)

c. Probably tow to Pearl the Pensacola, Independence, Gasconade, and Fallon if they can be made seaworthy. If not, study them here and sink them. (The Pensacola is supposed to be part of test Charlie if it can be ready).

d. The Huhges will be studied where she lies beached when she cools off enough to be studied; then it will be sunk here.

e. Fate of the other ships in the target array will depend on radioactivity. The plan on them is not yet firm.

6. A discussion of Admiral Solberg's plan as limited by our lack of monitors was held at this staff meeting, and it was decided to build up our monitors as quickly as possible in the hopes that these ships needed for Charlie could be back in Pearl by 15 January. It was agreed that this date could be met, but there was some optimism on radiological conditions.

7. The CBs reported that the moorings for Charlie will be ready by 25 August.

8. This morning I attended a conference on the Haven with Admiral Parsons, but the results were so well covered by his radio of this date that I have nothing to add. That conference accomplished a great deal towards raising the hopes that the monitors would continue to be a going concern in spite of the loss of such a large part of the present group.

9. The classification of this memo can only be explained by the fact that the Navy considers this contamination business the toughest part of test Baker. They had no idea it would be such a problem and they are breaking their necks out here to find some solution.


A. W. Betts
Colonel, Corps of Engrs

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