

Marshall Islands used as dumping ground

"The natives are delighted, enthusiastic about the atomic bomb, which has already brought them prosperity and a new promising future."

- U.S. Navy press statement, April, 1946

by Sarah Cox
Reprinted from the *Ubysey*,
by Canadian University Press

Friendly people and lush coconut trees greeted the first US military ship to arrive on the tropical island of Bikini in 1946.

The Marshall Island's military governor stepped onto Bikini's beach and summoned the native people to gather around him.

Bikini atoll has been chosen for the first series of US nuclear bomb tests in the Pacific, he told the curious people.

Scientists are experimenting with nuclear bombs "...for the good of mankind and to end all wars," said the governor. Turning to the Bikini chief, he said the 167 islanders must be moved immediately. He assured them that they would return after two atomic tests - the first nuclear explosion since the atomic bomb had been dropped on Nagasaki one year earlier.

Darlene Kejo was only three years old when Operation Crossroads blasted the Marshall Islands into the nuclear age. The islanders watched in awe as blinding light and mushroom clouds shattered the tranquillity of their small communities.

Only dots on the world map, the Marshall

Islands consist of thirty atolls - tiny coral islands encircling a lagoon. They are a federated state of Micronesia with a population of 30,000.

Keju came from the islands to tell the World Council of Churches' sixth assembly at the U of BC, this August, about the 37 years since Operation Crossroads.

She grew up on one of the northern islands, downwind of Bikini. For her, the word "cancer" is not just a nagging possibility; it is something Marshallese have learned to accept.

"We know we're dying out," she says, "there's no cure for these radiation problems."

Keju's deep brown eyes stare through a window at UBC's spacious campus - an ocean of area for someone who has spent most of her life on a crowded 66 acre island.

"Today, I have three tumours in my body - one was taken out recently," she says. "I don't know what causes them, but like many Marshallese I am afraid for the future."

Her soft stare lifts the veil which shrouds the Marshall Islands.

After Operation Crossroads, 66 more atomic and hydrogen explosions ripped through the tiny coral island. Six islands were vapourized, and many more, including Bikini, were so contaminated with radioactive fallout that they were declared uninhabitable.

US military vessels steaming into lagoons became a common sight, giving notice of impending danger from nuclear tests. Unable to object, the islanders would be shipped to another location with promises of return.

"They didn't even tell them when they would be moved," says Keju. "They felt like they were being treated like animals."

The Bikinians were moved a second time in 1947, after limited resources on their temporary

home caused wide-spread malnutrition.

The US is supposed to protect the Marshallese, Keju says, referring to a United Nations mandate to develop the islands towards self-sufficiency and to "protect the inhabitants against the loss of their lands and resources."

"But our response is 'protect us from whom?' We do not have any enemies. There is no word in the Marshallese language for enemy."

Before the years of mushroom clouds and ash-like fall-out, the Marshallese also did not have words for thyroid cancer, leukemia, cataracts, or the hideously deformed babies which later came to be known as "jellyfish."

More of these babies are born every year, says Keju.

"The baby is born on the labour table, and it breathes and moves up and down, but it is not shaped like a human being. It is colorful and looks like a bag of jelly. These babies only live a few hours.

"Sometimes, babies are born with growths like horns on their heads, while others have six fingers or toes," Keju says.

None of these problems occurred before the testing began, she says.

The US says scientists and doctors to examine the Marshallese, Keju says, but the medical treatment is inadequate and people often feel they are only being used for experiments.

"They come and look at us as if we were guinea-pigs. They never sit down with us and tell us exactly what is wrong, or give us personal medical records. And Marshallese are regularly shipped off to Honolulu, Cleveland, New York and elsewhere for cancer surgery with no explanation whatsoever."

Reports from US laboratory studies of Bikini and other contaminated areas indicate the islands are viewed as excellent sources for studies.

"The habitation of these people on the islands will afford most valuable ecological radiation data on human beings," said a report from the Brookhaven National Laboratory.

Twelve years of nuclear testing has slowly poisoned the food chain, says Keju. Some fish


continued
on next page

WE BUY and SELL
CURRENT, USED
UNIVERSITY TEXTS

THE EDMONTON BOOK STORE

*Dealers in used, out-of-print
and antiquarian books*

8909 - 112 St. (HUB Mall) 433-1781



Students' Orientation Services

requires a

DIRECTOR

responsibilities include:

- program administration
- making budget, financial policy, and fee recommendations to Policy Board
- develop and run promotional campaigns for the program
- all program activities
- some financial background

and ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR

responsibilities include:

- making recommendations on the recruitment, maintenance, training, and evaluation of leaders to Policy Board.
- making recommendations on seminar content and format to Policy Board
- assisting the Director with general program administration.

These positions demand interested and dedicated individuals. Each position requires the specified responsibilities, as well as sitting as a member of the SORSE Advisory Board.

Students' Orientation Services (SORSE) is a large, student-based orientation programme. Successful candidates will be interested, enthusiastic, and have time to contribute to the program. Experience with orientation is a definite asset, but not essential.

The term of office is one year. The positions offer full time employment over the summer, and part time salary for the winter months.

Further information may be obtained from the SORSE Office. A letter of application and a detailed resume should be submitted to:

CHAIRPERSON
SORSE Selection Committee
Room 278
Students' Union Bldg.
ph. 432-5319

Coming Thursday!

JAVA JIVE

Daily Special
Coupons

available only in the
Gateway

Check Them Out

The Savings begin
Friday, with a 1/2 Price
coffee coupon.
