

An Anniversary that many around the world will not know about

*March 7 1946 - March 7 2006 & 1st July 1946 – 1st July 2006
60 Years of Exodus from Bikini Atoll & Atomic Bomb Tests*

Operation Crossroads on Stamps

OPERATION CROSSROADS

The Legacy of Nuclear Testing at Bikini Atoll

<p>32 +8 MARSHALL ISLANDS</p> <p>EVACUATION OF BIKINI</p>	<p>Bikini Atoll, one of the northern-most parts of the Marshall Islands archipelago, was selected by the United States as an ideal site for full-scale atomic testing after World War II. In February 1946, Commodore Ben Wyatt of the U.S. Navy met with Bikini's native leaders to discuss the use of the atoll as a nuclear test site. They were told that their cooperation would help maintain world peace. Assured that the Bikinians could return when the atoll again was safe for habitation, Chief Juba and his people reluctantly agreed to evacuate. On March 7, 1946, the Bikinians boarded the LST-1108. The gentle islanders loaded all their belongings into the ship, including outrigger canoes and materials from their church, community hall and residences. This was the first of many relocations for the Bikinians, and it would be decades before even part of their homeland would be considered safe.</p>	<p>32 +8 MARSHALL ISLANDS</p> <p>BAKER</p>	<p>The first underwater nuclear test occurred when the "Baker" bomb was detonated on July 25, 1946, at Bikini Atoll. The primary objective of this test was to analyze the effect of a nuclear explosion on naval vessels. Outdated U.S. Navy ships and captured German and Japanese World War II vessels were brought into Bikini lagoon. Encased in a watertight steel caisson, the bomb was suspended 90 feet below the landing ship LSM-40. Radio signals from a command ship closed circuits that armed and then detonated the bomb at 8:45 a.m. The explosion created a series of huge waves that struck the target ships. The first wave — more than 90 feet high — crashed into the carrier Saratoga and the battleship Arkansas. The Saratoga was swept 800 yards from its mooring point and sank eight hours after the explosion. The Arkansas sank almost immediately.</p>
<p>32 +8 MARSHALL ISLANDS</p> <p>EARLY PREPARATIONS</p>	<p>After the destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki by the atom bomb in August 1945, U.S. military leaders were worried about the future implications of this new weapon. Hiroshima and Nagasaki had demonstrated what atomic bombs could do, but the U.S. Navy was concerned about the effects such weapons might have on naval targets. Thus, the primary objective of OPERATION CROSSROADS — commanded by Navy Vice Admiral William Henry Purnell Blandy — was to analyze the effects of atomic explosions against naval vessels, as well as appraise strategic implications in regard to naval design and tactics. In 1946, the 53rd Naval Construction Battalion prepared Bikini for atomic testing and for the arrival of military personnel. Several 70-foot steel towers were erected and mounted with lead-line remote-control cameras and blast pressure gauges.</p>	<p>32 +8 MARSHALL ISLANDS</p> <p>TARGET FLEET</p>	<p>The ghost fleet of OPERATION CROSSROADS included 96 vessels. Prominent among these were U.S. carriers Saratoga and Independence. The Saratoga, commissioned in 1927, was a battle-scarred veteran of World War II. Other targets included the U.S. battleship Arkansas, a veteran of two World Wars. This historic battleship participated in the Normandy invasion, as well as the Pacific campaigns at Iwo Jima and Okinawa. Captured vessels used as atomic targets included the Japanese battleship Nagato, commissioned in 1920. In 1941 the Nagato served as flagship for Fleet Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto, who staged the attack on Pearl Harbor. By the end of the war, the Nagato was the only Japanese battleship still afloat. Prinz Eugen, a German heavy cruiser was targeted at Bikini as well. Commissioned in 1942, it was involved in the 1941 sinking of the British battle cruiser Hood.</p>
<p>32 +8 MARSHALL ISLANDS</p> <p>ABLE</p>	<p>On July 1, 1946, the first of many nuclear tests was performed at Bikini Atoll. Codenamed "Able," this atomic explosion was comparable to those that occurred at Hiroshima and Nagasaki a year earlier. A B-29 — Dave's Dream — piloted by Major Woodrow P. Swencout, was to drop the bomb over the battleship Nevada, moored in the center of the target array. Deployed at 9:50 a.m., the bomb exploded at the correct altitude of 500 feet, but it was off-target by about 2,000 feet and detonated above the attack transport Gilliam. The blast created a shock wave that traveled with an initial velocity of more than a mile a second. A ball of fire created a mushroom cloud that reached to a height of more than 8,000 feet in only 30 seconds. As the cloud cooled, condensed water that had been absorbed into the cloud or vaporized by the explosion, formed a light, radioactive rain over Bikini.</p>	<p>32 +8 MARSHALL ISLANDS</p> <p>EFFECTS ON THE ISLAND</p>	<p>The atomic testing on Bikini Atoll in the Marshall Islands has left a somber legacy of human suffering and ecological damage. Marshalese natives who were in the area at the time of the nuclear blasts, or who returned to their native homes too soon, succumbed to the devastating effects of radiation poisoning. Unaware of the danger, these islanders ate fruit, vegetables and fish grown in contaminated environments. Unfortunately, many Bikinians suffered a variety of maladies including cancer, leukemia, thyroid problems and miscarriages, as well as irreversible genetic damage. Today only a small part of the Bikini Atoll is habitable, and experts estimate that it will be at least a century — if ever — before the radioactive content on Bikini naturally diminishes to the point where it will again be suitable for human habitation.</p>

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The face value of each stamp includes an 8¢ surcharge for the benefit of the people of Bikini.

The Marshall Islands in 1996 issued a set of semi-postals intended to assist the Bikini refugees on the 50th anniversary of their displacement. Two of these stamps (shown above) are based on actual photos of the first two US nuclear tests in 1946. This test series was called 'Operation Crossroads' and the tests were named Able, an airdrop, and Baker, an underwater shot. The awesome size of the Baker test can be appreciated by noting the naval vessels in the foreground, dwarfed by the ascending fireball.

Stanley Gibbons: Marshall Islands 1996 50th Anniv of Operation Crossroads (Stanley Gibbons 721–726)

Bob Hope was right! He said:
*“As soon as the war ended,
 we located the one spot on
 earth that hadn't been
 touched by the war
 and blew it to hell.”*



On 7th March 1946 the total inhabitants of a tiny atoll in the Pacific began an epic journey – into evacuation.

It began with President Truman's directive of December 1945, which stated: (Nuclear Weapons Tests will take place) "to determine the effect of atomic bombs on American warships." So began a joint Army and Navy joint task force. Because of its isolated location away from all major air and shipping routes (*Two thousand miles southwest of Hawaii and 250 miles north of Kwajalein island*), Bikini Atoll was chosen although it was lightly inhabited.

The Marshall Island group had had an unsettled history. A German trading company had an outpost in 1885, and Japan conquered and occupied in WWI and the United States invaded in 1944 and administered the group as a Trust Territory and finally a Republic was established in 1979 with a 'Compact of Free Association' with USA signed in 1986.

And so it was a Sunday in February 1946 that Commodore Ben Wyatt (Military Governor) went to Bikini to meet with the assembled inhabitants, after a church service. He asked them to abandon their homes and land and way of life 'temporarily' so that USA could test atomic bombs "For the good of mankind." King Juda and the people were confused and distressed as they discussed this proposal. After a full discussion the King told Wyatt, "We will go believing that everything is in the hands of God."



(fig *1)

In March 1946 all 167 inhabitants of Bikini were (fig *1) transported on a Navy LST to Rongerik Atoll, which is 125 miles east. There is a long story about Rongerik which cannot be told here. They were given food for just a few weeks and they soon found out that coconut trees and local crops yielded little fruit. It was too late to go home as over 42,000 military and civilian personnel had swamped Bikini to prepare for **Operation**

Crossroads. In the years to come the Bikini people were relocated several times.

Vice Admiral William P Blandy was appointed Commander of Operation Crossroads. He tried to pacify the concerns of many:



“The bomb will not start a chain reaction in the water, converting it all to gas and letting all the ships on all the oceans drop down to the bottom. It will not blow out the bottom of the sea and let all the water run down the hole. It will not destroy gravity. I am not an atomic playboy.”

[picture: Admiral W.H.P. “Spike” Blandy, Mrs. Blandy and Rear Admiral F.J. Lowry celebrate the end of Operation Crossroads in November of 1946 in Washington, D.C. This photograph, entitled “Atomic Age Angel Food,” drew heavy criticism from throughout the nation and from around the world.]



(fig *2)

** Photographic evidence available

The atoll was prepared with various measurement devices including 70 feet high towers (fig *2) together with an assembled fleet of old war ships, which included an aircraft carrier, captured Japanese warship and some concrete barges. **Animals were secured in various places to further test the effects of the atomic explosion.

A B-29 called ‘Dave’s Dream’ adorned with a Rita Haworth picture from 509 Wing and piloted by Gen (Ret) Woodrow P. Swancutt, Pilot (then a Major) [But this is now disputed and Roswell Deputy Base Commander Lt. Col. Payne Jennings is claimed to be Pilot].



The plane dropped a ‘Fat Man’ bomb on 1st July 1946. The bomb run was made at 28,000



(fig *6)

There is a claim that the US authorities deliberately exposed some native islanders to radiation. (fig *6) Subsequent illnesses of islanders include cancers, leukaemia, thyroid problems and miscarriages. Grandchildren have been born with horrendous abnormalities.



Development of the infrastructure to support the clean up and resettlement programs on Bikini Atoll started early in calendar year 1991. The program was concentrated at Eneu Island, which had been declared safe for habitation, and is the main support base for the clean-up activities. In 1998, cleanup activities began on Bikini island with a 300 acre land clearing project. In 1999, however, because of the adoption by the Nuclear Claims Tribunal of the 15 millirem EPA radiological cleanup standard in December of 1998, the cleanup of Bikini was put on hold pending further funding from the U.S. government. The reason for this is that the new standards caused a dramatic rise in the overall cost for the radiological cleanup, money which the Bikinians just do not have.

The Bikinians began a class action and a USA Tribunal was convened and after many years a settlement was reached. On March 5, 2001, the **Nuclear Claims Tribunal** handed

down a decision on a seven year lawsuit the Bikinians had brought against the United States for damages done to their islands and their people during the nuclear testing on Bikini. The Tribunal gave them a total award of \$563,315,500.00 [loss of value \$278,000,000.00, restoration costs \$251,500,000.00, suffering and hardship \$33,814,500.00], which is the final amount after deducting the past compensation awarded by the U.S. government. The problem is that the Nuclear Claims Tribunal, which was created by the Compact of Free Association of 1986, was under funded and does not have the money to pay for this claim. It is now up to the people of Bikini to petition the U.S. Congress for the money to fulfil this award. This is expected to take many years and it is uncertain if the United States will honour their claim.

At this time the people of Bikini remain scattered throughout the Marshall Islands and the world as they wait for the cleanup of Bikini to begin in earnest, mostly due to the fact that the money they have received from the U.S. government is not adequate to fund a full radiological cleanup of the entire atoll.

[Reverend John Walden is a British nuclear veteran from Maralinga in 1957 and is Editor of Campaign magazine, the organ of The British Nuclear Tests Veterans Association and lives in Norwich England. John is a retired Church of England minister. One interest is philately and he almost has a complete collection of stamps depicting atom bombs. Acknowledgements for this article are due to the 5,640,000 pages under 'Operation Crossroads' on the web, Truman Presidential Library and especially the very helpful Debbie Gitner of Henry Gitner Philatelists Inc, New York, as well as the still displaced Bikini Atoll people in the Marshall Islands.

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