

TRUST TERRITORY OF THE PACIFIC ISLANDS

Office of the District Administrator

Majuro, Marshall Islands

Meeting held at Court House, Majuro, Marshall Islands, Thursday, Aug. 15, 1957.

Present: High Commissioner D.H. Nucker, Maynard Neas, Wm. G. White, and William Allen from Trust Territory Administration; members of the Marshallese Congress Hold-Over Committee, and other leaders of the Marshallese people.

Interpreter: Amata Kabua

District Administrator Maynard Neas opened the meeting, stating that it was an honor to have the High Commissioner present at Majuro. The High Commissioner's remarks would be his own, addressed primarily to the members of the Marshallese Congress Hold-Over Committee, and to the people directly interested in the settlement of claims for the use of land.

MR. NUCKER: Mr. Neas, members of the Hold-Over Committee, ladies and gentlemen. As most of you know, last March I was sent back to the United States for a major and serious operation. There was a time when I did not know whether I was going to get well and meet with you people again, and now that I did get well and was able to come back, I am more than happy to be here with you. Today I wanted to meet with you, renew acquaintances, and talk about a few matters which we have been interested in for the past three years, and which we have discussed several times before. I can well remember the first time I talked with a group of Marshallese about three years ago, and at that time when I asked what you were interested in, you had certain specific problems which you mentioned.

I listed these problems just about ten minutes ago, and would like to report to you on them. These problems were then: 1st, the desire of the Marshallese people to have the land payments made; 2d, to have some help in answering the transportation problem; 3d, everybody wanted to know when the people of Rongelap would be returned to their home atoll; 4th, you wanted assurance that there would be no more fallouts from atomic tests such as had happened when the people from Rongelap were hurt. Another problem at that time was the shortage of rice and other food.

Now there were a number of other problems not as important as these, such as school training, better agriculture program, etc., which I will not discuss now. In talking about the problems I have mentioned, I will leave the problem of land settlements until last, because I want to do more talking about that than any of the others.

Transportation has been studied and has been worked on very much by the people in Majuro as well as headquarters in Guam. We have, in three years, turned over the MILLEETA, made possible the purchase of the MIEGO QUEEN, and have kept the ROQUE in the Territory. We are now considering the purchase of a boat from Ponape for Kwajalein Trading Company. We do not have today as much transportation as the people in the Marshalls would like us to have, but we have more than we had three years ago, and I believe six months from now our transportation will be, in large measure, settled.

So far as the people from Rongelap are concerned, within the past few weeks they have been returned to Rongelap, and those of us who have seen it know that they have good homes to live in, and that much has been done to make their life on Rongelap a pleasant and agreeable one.

Another problem you wanted assurance on was no more harm from atomic fallout. There have been no more people hurt. With the precautions and care the U.S. Government is taking in setting up stations for air and radio information, I do not think there will be any danger of another fallout. I do not think there is that possibility now. I have talked with the Atomic Energy Commission people in the United States, and they will take every action they can to insure that no one will get hurt.

So far as shortage of food which we had here three years ago, I do not believe we have any shortages today, and I do not think we have had any serious shortages since the government started working with MIEGO and KITGO. There have been shortages, but not serious ones. We have started bringing in commercial ships direct from the United States, and have increased the ability of MIEGO and KITGO to buy food, in addition to somewhat better transportation, I think will take care of the food problem from now on.

Now I want to tell this group what we have done with respect to land settlements, and I want you to know how I feel about the land settlement problem in the Marshalls. Some of you may remember, in 1954 or the first part of 1955, when I talked with you, that I said at that time I felt very badly personally that the land claims of the Marshalls had not been paid. Since I became the Deputy High Commissioner, and then High Commissioner, I felt, and have always felt, that the U.S. should have settled those claims and should not have waited so long to get them paid. However, as your High Commissioner, and as an individual who wanted to get claims paid, I first had to get some money with which to pay claims. You will recall that I have told you in the past that I was trying to get that money, and you were told we had gotten money to pay those claims in July of 1956. There was nothing I could do -- there was nothing the Administration could do -- until we had money.

In the past year, since we got our money, the Trust Territory government has settled the land claims in Truk -- all of them. We settled those land claims first because there were not so many of them and because the people in Truk, through their Land Advisory Board, told us what they wanted

for their land, and what their land was worth. The people in Truk told us their land was worth from \$150 per acre for poor land to \$350 per acre for the best land. We paid the Truk people on the basis of what they told us.

In Ponape, we had very few claims, but we had one very large claim. We settled that claim -- again on the basis of what the individuals who owned the land, and the Administration, were able to work out as a fair value for the land in this particular large claim. We paid the Etscheits in Ponape about \$200 per acre.

We settled the claims with the people from Bikini, now on Kili, and the people from Eniwetok, now on Ujelang, after thorough discussion with the people on each of those places. We took into consideration, when we arrived at an amount to settle those claims, the size of Eniwetok and the size of Bikini, and the size of the land at Ujelang, at Kili and other islands which we have made available to the people. We gave the people at Kili \$25,000 in cash, and we put \$300,000 in a trust fund for them to get interest twice a year as income from that trust fund. This means that the people on Kili will get about \$5,000 every six months as interest from that \$300,000 I told you about. At Ujelang we gave the people \$25,000 cash money, and we set up a trust fund of \$150,000. This means that the people in Ujelang will get about \$2500 each six months as interest from their trust fund.

Now we settled the claims in Truk because there were not too many, and because the people told us what they thought was fair. We settled claims in Ponape, because there were not many, and because the people told us what they thought was a fair price for their land. We settled claims in Kili and Ujelang because they were moved from their homes and we thought they were entitled to be paid first.

Now there have been other claims settled by the U.S. Navy in this area. All the claims at Saipan have been settled. The Navy gave land to the Saipanese to replace land that had been taken from the Saipanese. The Navy determined that the land they gave for settlement was worth \$40.00 per acre and settled on that basis. In Guam, after the war, there were many claims and there was a large amount of land for which claims had to be paid. Those claims have been paid. People have gone to court in Guam, have had values for their land decided, and I understand the most money paid for farm land in Guam was about \$100 per acre. Most of the land on Guam -- agricultural land -- was settled for \$40.00 per acre.

Not too long ago -- I think it was in April -- the Deputy High Commissioner and others from headquarters -- went to Ebeye to offer to make settlements there. I was sorry I could not be present because I wanted so much to be with the people when the offer of settlement was made. We offered \$500 per acre for the settlement of claims there, with the understanding that the land would be used by the U.S. government as long as it was needed -- we do not know how long that will be -- that the need for the land would be

looked at each five years and if not needed, would be returned to the people who originally owned it. We thought that offer was fair because of the experiences we had in settling land claims in Truk, Ponape, and knowing how claims were settled in Saipan and Guam. We thought that the land in the Marshalls was more valuable than the land in Truk for which we paid a top price of \$350 per acre, and the land in Ponape for which we paid a top price of \$200 per acre. That is why we offered \$500 for land in Kwajalein. We did not try -- and I am told this is where we had our trouble -- to buy the land outright. We tried to pay for the use of the land for as long as it was needed, and then return it to the people who owned it when we no longer needed it.

The people at Kwajalein did not think our offer was fair, and they did not accept it. This was their privilege, and I am glad, if they did not think it was right, that they did not accept it. Before we settle any claim I want to be satisfied that the people think they are being treated right. It was your land, it is your land, you should have been paid before now, and all I want -- when you are paid -- is for you to think that you have been treated fairly. I do not know how we can make any more offers for the land at Kwajalein until we know what the people want. I want you to know, and I want you to tell your friends, that as the High Commissioner, I do not feel angry, I do not feel hurt, because the people did not accept our offer. We had intended, after settling at Kwajalein, to come down to this area and other areas to continue settling land claims until we had them all paid. I do not think now that we should keep on trying to make settlements in other places until we have decided on what the settlement will be in Kwajalein, because I do not want some people to get more than others. I want all the people to be treated fairly and treated alike. I know that in settling claims we cannot make everybody happy. We are going to have some individuals who want more money, but here we have a case where all the people on Kwajalein told us they did not like our terms.

There are a number of ways we could try to solve this problem at the present time. I want to tell you now what I think would be the best way to solve this problem. Since the \$500 per acre, and the period of time I talked about, was approved by me after talking with many people, I thought it was a fair amount. Since it was not accepted, I would like to talk to other people to see what they think a fair amount would be.

This is what I think I will do. I will meet the Secretary of the Interior on Sunday, and we will be here in Majuro next Tuesday. I want to talk with him. He is my boss, and he reports directly to the President of the United States. He is a very important man in the United States government. He sits with and meets with the President of the U.S. regularly, and I will prize and appreciate his advice very much. We are very fortunate to have this man visit us. It is the first time a Secretary of the Interior has ever visited the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands, and he is going to call on all of our districts. He is a very busy man, and will not have enough time to talk about all of your problems in the Marshalls, so I want to talk with him about what I think is the most important problem -- land settlements.

I am going to suggest to him the setting up of a Land Commission which would probably have three people on it. None of these three people would be on my staff, none of these three people would be bound by anything I have said before about the land values in the Trust Territory. These three people would come to the Marshalls -- to Kwajalein or wherever they would need to go -- to have the Marshallese people tell them what they think their land is worth, and why they think so. After they have met with the people in the Marshalls, and the people of the Marshalls have told them what they think about their land, this Commission will then make recommendations to me about what we should offer and how we should pay these claims. We have money which I will set aside, and will not let be used for any other purpose, so that when the Commission makes its recommendations, and if these are agreeable, then we will have the money to start paying claims with. If the money I have at the present time is not enough, then I will have to try to get more money from the United States. This having a Land Commission will permit the people of the Marshalls to be heard. It will permit them to tell a group of people who are separate from my office, what they think, and it will permit the Commission to make recommendations as to what they think would be fair.

Now -- I repeat -- I have not made up my mind to do this. It is only what I am thinking would be a fair way to handle the problem at this time. I will talk about this with the Secretary of the Interior, who is the man to whom I report, and learn what he thinks. He may have other ideas-- I do not know. If he has other ideas, other suggestions, then, of course, I will try to follow them. If he thinks what I have said here is a good suggestion, I will try to carry it out to make certain that we settle the land claims on what is fair and right. We do not want to settle these land claims on any other basis. I do not want to ask you this afternoon to talk about this here, because I do not know, and you do not know, whether it is good or bad. I am sorry we cannot keep on paying our claims, until we get this situation straightened out and settled.

When the Secretary of Interior is here I want him to meet the members of the Hold-Over Committee, and I want them to tell him anything they want to discuss with him. He will be very busy, but I will be glad to tell him about anything you would like to have me tell him and will meet with those of you who wish, here tomorrow afternoon.

Since being here, I have seen a number of things you people have done that are good. Each time I come to the Marshalls, it is a little better than before. I saw the school in Rita, and am pleased with your progress on it. I am glad to be here, and want you to know how I feel about the land problem. Now that we have money, we are ready to make settlement, but I want it to be the right kind.

Thank you all for coming to this meeting, and thank you, Amata, for acting as interpreter.

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