

On board, July 10th, 1966

FRENCH NAVY

CEP⁽¹⁾

SHIP: LA COQUILLE

S.M.C.B.⁽²⁾

MISSION OF LA COQUILLE IN THE GAMBIE ARCHIPELAGO
2-10 JULY 1966

CHRONOLOGY:

La Coquille arrived in the waters of the Gambier Archipelago on July 5th.

The first positive results of measurement [*of radioactivity*] were found in plankton gathered a few miles North of the Gambier and in fish (mainly content of stomach) fished in the same area.

La Coquille entered the Rikitea harbour on July 6th in the morning.

Measurements started then on local consumables like vegetables, fruits and drinking water.

The results will be made available in the technical report for the Biological Safety Service.

By way of example, according to the board spectrometer on July 6th:

Unwashed salads: 18,000 picocuries per gram

Washed salads: 5,000 picocuries per gram

Drinking water shows a level of radioactivity 6 times higher than normal.

On July 8th, after it had rained heavily for 12 hours, samples of soil taken from gutters in Rikitea showed 1,400 picocuries per gram. On the other hand, unwashed salads had gone down to 1,700 in Rikitea and 4,000 in Taku.

Fish meat was never found notably contaminated.

However, these results are just a first estimation and they need to be checked and explained.

No ban has been considered: *Coquille* and *Protet*⁽³⁾ buy their vegetable on land and *La Coquille* takes water from the wharf in Rikitea. The crews go on land and go about their business without using dosimeters.

PSYCHOLOGICAL CLIMATE ON THE ISLAND:

- 1) The local population is totally unaware, carefree and shows no curiosity at all.
- 2) Father Daniel is dreaming of his next travel and has no idea of what a fallout could be.
- 3) The police officer (gendarme Cornette) is suspecting something, he is taking a lot of showers, but is not seriously concerned. We reassured him. He is a reliable element and no matter what happens, he will follow through.
- 4) The other reliable populaas⁽⁴⁾ on the island (nurses, farmers) don't show any concern and don't ask questions.
- 5) The troops based in Taku know about it, however most of them are of course not aware of how high the levels [*of radioactivity*] are. Some of them were concerned in

the first few days, but they didn't say much and they now behave as if everything was fine.

- 6) The L.D.O.s⁽⁵⁾ who don't socialize with the local population in Rikitea are the only ones who showed concern. In their hotel, they are still only drinking bottled water, but they eat vegetables. They consist of 2 intellectuals and 3 or 4 technicians, all of them young people. Apparently, one of them got burnt in the Sahara. The suspicions they harboured were allayed by Lt Colonel Stephanis' mission and by us. We confirmed to them that salad and vegetables could be eaten and we told them about the control tests conducted on board of La Coquille. For the time being, they are reassured, but they are still concerned about what could happen next if there was a more serious fallout. They stress the fact that it would be impossible to take real protective measures for the population.

Summary: The psycho-political situation in the Gambier Islands doesn't seem to pose a problem for the time being.

As far as the leaks are concerned, it is no use trying to know where they come from. In the Gambier, it was the Minister himself, who told people about the fallout after having been informed by the Captain from SMRS⁽⁶⁾. Moreover, the Volunteer in charge spent a few sleepless nights in Taku encoding and decoding messages and the people from the Geophysical Laboratory in Rikitea regularly correspond with Papeete via wireless telephone.

CURRENT ORGANISATION OF THE COMMAND:

- 1) The Volunteer in charge has so much to do that he is unable to cope. He has no support staff (assistant, accountant or clerk). Most of his time is spent on administrative matters, encoding and decoding of messages. As a result, he cannot have the necessary overview of the situation and fulfill his role. Furthermore, in spite of his outstanding personal qualities, his responsibilities are too heavy for him. Neither is he old enough nor has he the necessary rank to measure up with officers who are older than him and with old crafty under-officers. The Volunteer himself is the first to admit it.
- 2) The Captain from SMRS⁽⁶⁾ reacted perfectly well. He only deplores the bad organisation at local level, the lack of safety measures in case of an excess of radioactivity and above all the lack of an unequivocal policy towards the population, which puts us in an awkward position. Out of honesty, he is concerned for the children of the village who walk barefoot and play on the ground.
- 3) The legion officer and his men are carrying out their duties, unruffled.

SUGGESTIONS FOR THE SECOND HALF OF THE CAMPAIGN:

- 1) The assessment of the total amount [of radioactivity] received by the population is to be made in August and submitted to the GOEN⁽⁷⁾. It might be necessary to minimize the real figures, so that we do not lose the confidence of the population, who would realize that something has been concealed from them right from the first test.
- 2) Safety measures are currently being coordinated: shelters, stocks of food supplies, water (watertightness of 2 water tanks, about 70m³, in the vicinity of the Rikitea cathedral, should be checked).
The resources of the SMRS⁽⁶⁾ should be stepped up (spare equipment in case of contamination).
The resources of the SMCB⁽²⁾ should be built up (additional simple detection devices, so that the Service can be fully operative. Also, it should be kept informed about

planned measures. In Rikitea, we read incidentally the order on threshold doses planned in Tureia, Reao, Gambier and the SMCB⁽²⁾ were not on the distribution list).

- 3) A clear policy towards the population, no discrimination for safety suits, dosimeters ... Keeping them informed would be the most simple solution. Moreover, a “dress-up” would probably amuse the inhabitants of Mangareva.
- 4) A re-organisation of local command. I see the necessity to install ONE single officer who should be old enough, have a minimum knowledge in radiobiology and above all have recognized authority to win the trust of both civilians and troops. Only such a leadership would be able to bring together the various institutions that are so far scattered and divided and could in the case of an accident impose relevant measures without arising suspicion.

Furthermore, secrecy should be strengthened: GOEN⁽⁷⁾ and CEP⁽¹⁾ should not be charged with making decisions at the same time, as this is a source of delay and complications, instructions for visiting ships should be drafted (possible use of distillers, purchase and consumption of local products, clothes to be worn by soldiers on leave or passengers).

Finally, leisure activities should be organised on the Gambier, including movies, which the population is really fond of.

SPECIFIC MEASURES TO BE TAKEN:

- 1) Offer a trip to Papeete to the school headmistress between July 20th and 30th.
- 2) Permanently remove from the Gambier Islands and from the Private Radio Stations Organisation the couple of European teachers who have already been declared unwanted in Hao. Fortunately, they are on leave in Papeete and in Australia during the first half of this campaign.

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⁽¹⁾ CEP: Centre d'Expérimentation du Pacifique, (Pacific Testing Centre)

⁽²⁾ S.M.C.B. Service Mixte de Contrôle Biologique (Biological Safety Service)

⁽³⁾ Protet: Escort ship

⁽⁴⁾ Popaas: People of European ancestry from France and other Western countries

⁽⁵⁾ L.D.O.: Limited Duty Officer

⁽⁶⁾ SMRS: Service Mixte de Sécurité Radiologique (Radiological Safety Service)

⁽⁷⁾ GOEN: Groupement Opérationnel des Expérimentations Nucléaires (Operational Team on Nuclear Experiments)