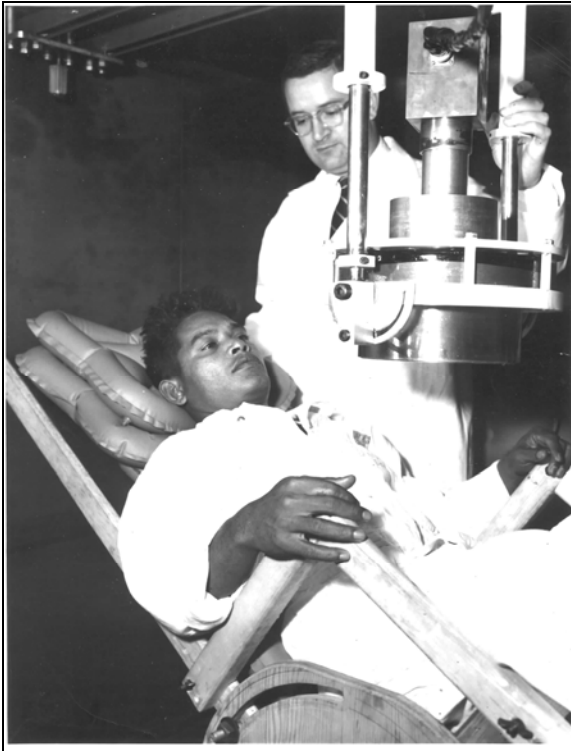


**From the Marshall Islands Journal Friday, July 30, 2004**



**P1:**

## **Anjain's life with Bravo**

John Anjain, the mayor of Rongelap Atoll during the 1954 Bravo hydrogen bomb blast, is tested for radiation exposure during a 1957 trip to Argonne National Laboratory in Chicago. Anjain, 83, died in Honolulu last week. Story, P12.

## **Remembering a great man of the Marshalls**

By GIFF JOHNSON

John Anjain, a Marshall Islander who was an icon among survivors of American nuclear test fallout, died at Straub Hospital in Honolulu on Tuesday last week. He was 83.

After suffering exposure to a nearly lethal dose of nuclear test fallout 50 years ago, Anjain became an outspoken critic of US government secrecy and what he termed the use of islanders as “guinea pigs” by American government scientists.

Anjain was the mayor of tiny Rongelap Atoll when the US government detonated the ‘Bravo’ hydrogen bomb test on March 1, 1954 at Bikini Atoll, 100 miles to the west. The 15-megaton blast engulfed Anjain and the 81 other inhabitants of his remote atoll in a snowstorm of radioactive fallout.

It was two days before American authorities evacuated Anjain and the Rongelap people from islands that were so ‘hot’ from the fallout that the needles on Geiger counters flew off the scale when US officials arrived to check on the islanders.

Bravo was the largest hydrogen bomb ever tested by America.

In the days before the Internet and satellite communications produced instantaneous access to news in virtually any corner of the world, US officials in 1954 were able to describe Bravo as a “route atomic test” and to mislead the press that among the Marshall Islanders “exposed to some radioactivity, there were no burns (and) all were reported well.”

In actuality, within days of the Bravo test, Anjain and many of the Rongelap islanders were experiencing severe vomiting, diarrhea and skin burns and later their hair fell out — classic signs of radiation exposure that were first seen among Japanese atomic bomb survivors at Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Three years after Bravo, in 1957, Anjain and his community were returned home to Rongelap, despite the fact that US officials knew that Rongelap was one of the most radiation contaminated areas in the world and had performed no nuclear clean up work at the atoll.

The visits by US government doctors and scientists sparked anger and distrust among islanders who said the scientists were more interested in studying them than in providing medical care for the numerous health problems — ranging from early increases in miscarriages and stillbirths to thyroid tumors and many types of cancer.

For Anjain, the death of his son Leko at the age of 19 in 1972 from leukemia was a pivotal moment that led him and other Rongelap Islanders to refuse the annual US medical survey that year and to escalate their calls for independent doctors to evaluate their health condition.

The next year, a Congress of Micronesia investigative team issued a scathing report on failures of the US government’s medical program to inform Rongelap Islanders about their exposure and health problems.

Anjain began traveling to Washington, New York and Japan to tell his story to the outside world. His testimony — the tragic story of unsuspecting victims of the Cold War — prompted modest US government compensation programs and would ultimately help lead to significantly increased US compensation in the Compact of Free Association in the mid-1980s.

But it was Rongelap Islanders’ self-evacuation from their home atoll in 1985 that dramatized their plight, forcing the US government to commit funding to independent scientific studies of Rongelap — studies that confirmed Anjain’s suspicions of hazardous levels of contamination and have since led to the US Congress providing resettlement funding for nuclear clean up and rehabilitation work on Rongelap.

Unusually for a culture that is oral not written, during the 50 years after Bravo, Anjain documented events in writing, frequently writing long letters about radiation-related health problems among the Rongelap community that were published in the Journal.

Anjain’s remains were expected to be flown back to Ebeye on Thursday this week for funeral services, and later burial at Mejatto Island, home of the displaced islanders.

## Rongelap mayor tells the tragic saga started by Bravo

# John Anjain: 'We are the guinea pigs'

*In 1981, researcher and former Peace Corps Volunteer (Utrik) Glenn Alcalay interviewed John Anjain, who was then 61, about his experience with the Bravo test and its aftermath. An excerpt of that interview follows.*

I was magistrate on Rongelap in 1954. Before that time while I was in Majuro, a fellow who worked with the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) stuck out the tip of his finger — about a half-inch or so — and said, “John, your life is just about that long.” When I asked him what he meant, he explained that they were setting off a bomb on Bikini soon. I asked him why they did not move the people of Rongelap first and he told me that they had not gotten word from Washington to evacuate the people beforehand.

On the morning of the bomb, I was awake and drinking coffee. I thought I saw what appeared to be the sunrise but it was in the west. It was truly beautiful with many colors — red, green and yellow — and I was surprised. A little while later the sun rose in the east. Then sometime later something like smoke filled the entire sky and shortly after that a strong and warm wind — as in a typhoon — swept across Rongelap. Then all of the people heard the great sound of the explosion. Some people began to cry with fright. Several hours later the powder began to fall on Rongelap. We saw four planes fly overhead and we thought perhaps the planes had dropped this powder which covered our island and stuck to our bodies. The visibility was less than one-half mile at that time due to the haze in the sky.

The next day, early in the morning, I looked at all of the catchments with Jabwe (the health aide) and Billiet (the school principal), and we noticed that the water had turned to yellow. I then warned the people not to drink from these water catchments and told them to only drink ‘ni’ (coconuts).

Then people began to get sick with vomiting, aches all over the body, eye irritations, and general weakness and fatigue. After the second day, most of the people were unable to move around as usual due to their fatigue. Just a few strong, young were up and about at that time and I asked them to fetch some coconuts for the rest of us to drink. On the evening of the second day, a seaplane arrived from Enewetak with two men who brought some strange machines. They stayed only about twenty minutes and they took some readings of water catchments and soil and then they took off again. They really did not tell us very much.

On the morning of the third day, a Navy destroyer came and told me, “John Anjain, you have to leave this island at once or you and your people will die.” We were allowed to bring only what we were wearing — nothing else. At this time, most of the people were feeling quite dizzy — as if drunk — and they were very weak. From Rongelap we went to Ailinginae to pick up eighteen people who were getting fish there. Then we went to Kwajalein.

In Kwajalein, we were very sick and in much pain, with body burns and bleeding on our necks and feet. After one week the doctors came from the States — Drs. Cronkite, Conard and the medical team. They made us bathe three times a day because they said our illnesses were of a new type and there was no medicine for us.

After some time, they moved the Utrik people over to Ebeye and said that they had ‘no poison,’ and that we had ‘just a little poison.’ After three months they took us to Ejit Island in Majuro. The United States caused us much discomfort and misery at that time and we all suffered much illness and weakness.

Then in 1957 they returned us to Rongelap. At the time of our return, the High Commissioner and some representatives from the United Nations Trusteeship Council came to our island. We asked them if it was safe to return to our island and they all agreed that there was still a little bit of radiation left on Rongelap and that it might injure our health, but not very much. With that slight reassurance, we returned, but we had much fear then.

After our return, many women began to have problems with childbearing. On several occasions, women gave birth to creatures which did not resemble human beings: some of these creatures looked like monkeys, some like octopuses, and some like bunches of grapes. One baby was born, and though it was very large, it did not have a complete head and after three days it died.

The people complained repeatedly about these deformities — we were really scared — but the AEC doctors told us not to worry because ‘there was just a little bit of radiation left on Rongelap.’

In 1963 the thyroid problems started to occur. In 1969 the AEC took my son Lekoj and two other children to New York for their thyroid problems. In 1972 they noticed that the white blood cell count of my son was very low. They took him to Honolulu for blood transfusions and Dr. Conard told me that he would be alright. Then they notified me to go to Washington where they had taken my son. I arrived at the hospital and saw that my son’s condition was very serious and that he was very weak. I will never forget being in Washington with my son — I have never felt such sadness in all of my life. He died a day later from leukemia.

After this I went to Hiroshima and Nagasaki with members of the Congress of Micronesia to request help from independent doctors, but the Trust Territory government would not allow these doctors to visit Rongelap and Utrik and this only made me suspicious.

Later on, these doctors from Japan — who only made it as far as Majuro before they were forced to return to Japan — reported that we should not have returned to Rongelap in 1957.

At the present time the people of Rongelap are forbidden to use the northern part of their atoll. They are really scared up there and wonder if perhaps they should move away from that place entirely. Many Rongelap and Utrik people refuse to return and live in their former islands and choose to live in Ebeye and Majuro instead.

From the beginning of the testing program in our islands the United States has treated us like animals in a scientific experiment for their studies. They come and study us like animals and think of us as ‘guinea pigs.’ We are the ‘guinea pigs.’

# Pursuit of the truth



By Bill Graham

*John Anjain was simply an incredible person. He was certainly one of the kindest people I have ever met but it would have been a colossal error in judgment to take that kindness as weakness. Throughout his life, John had tremendous strength of character and during the past 50 years, he was totally resolute in his pursuit of truth about the nuclear testing program and justice for all those who were harmed by it. More than anyone, John epitomized being a survivor of that program rather than a victim of it.*

*I developed an immediate and immense respect for John during my very first discussion with him in 1989 and that respect grew each time that he and I talked. His death fills me with a devastating grief and leaves a huge void in the pool of human treasures in this world.*

*Much will be written and said about John in the coming days, here in the Marshall Islands as well as in the US and Japan where he was also highly respected. What follows are some of the things that have been written or said about him.*

From *A Tidy Universe of Islands*, a 1997 memoir by Dr. William Peck, who was assigned to Rongelap by the US Public Health Service in 1958: The fallout (from the Bravo test on March 1, 1954) appeared first as an indefinite haze, rapidly changing to a white, sifting powder: like snow, said some who had seen movies at Kwajalein. They pointed with glee at the sticky powder that smeared their skin, whitened their hair, and rimed the ground with hoarfrost.

John, the solemn young Magistrate who had been elected two years before and wore his responsibility with unusual concern, found it difficult to be amused. He laughed with others at the strange events but worried about them as he walked along the beach alone

trying to find an explanation.

Later a seaplane splashed to a landing and men in military uniforms, carrying boxlike instruments, came on shore looking worried. The Americans called for the head man and a translator. John came forward with the schoolteacher, all the other Rongelapese crowding close behind to watch and listen. He stood very erect, proud of his position as magistrate and waited. A tall, sweating officer, in an unnatural, loud voice said 'Now I don't want any of you to get worried.'

The officer launched into a prolonged discussion of the nature of fallout, the necessity of decontamination, the chagrin that he, in fact all Americans, felt for such an unfortunate accident. In his effort to be understood, he spoke loudly, repeating the key words many times. John understood none of it except to learn one of his first words in English, the same word that the other Rongelapese learned. This word was 'radiation'.

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From an April 1957 black and white US newsreel: "To the AEC Argonne labs in Chicago last week came seven men, natives of the Marshall Islands. These are fishing people, savages by our standards. When the white powder fell, it was incinerated coral, highly radioactive. The Marshallese caught by fallout got 175 roentgens of radiation. Most humans are exposed to less than 20 roentgens in a lifetime. So a cross section, a delegation, was brought to Chicago for testing.

The first was John, the Mayor of Rongelap atoll. John, as we said, is a savage but a happy, amenable savage. His grandfather ran almost naked on his coral atoll. The white man brought money and religion and a market for his copra. John reads, knows about God, and is a pretty good Mayor.

The iron room is a radiation detector for human beings. John's first visit to the white man's country meant San Francisco cable cars, Chicago skyscrapers and the iron room. A savage governs his life by ritual and he understands this because he thinks of it as a new regimen. A long lonely wait sitting alone inside the iron room; outside is a strange kind of priest in a long white coat.

When the ritual of the iron room was over for John, it began for the others until one by one they had all gone through it. As each finished, he was told it was over and he was given apples and other good things to eat. And then the seven men went back to the Marshall Islands, in the middle of the Pacific ocean, where hardly anyone lives."

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From a 1992 Brookhaven National Laboratory 'Informal Report' written by Dr. Robert Conard (who headed the annual BNL medical teams to Rongelap from 1954 until his retirement in the early 1990s) and entitled 'Fallout': "This report is dedicated to John Anjain, a quiet unassuming man, well liked, and a respected leader of the Rongelap people. His family suffered extremely from the effects of the fallout. He and four members of his family underwent surgery for removal of thyroid tumors. The tumor in his wife was malignant. His youngest son, who was one year of age at the time of the fallout, had a thyroid tumor removed at age 12 and later developed an acute form of leukemia when he was 19 years old. Although extensively treated in the United States, he died. His death was a cause of great grief to his family and to the Marshallese people.

In spite of all these troubles, including evacuation from their home island and socioeconomic disruption, I have never heard John express bitterness. However, he has continued to champion the cause of his people. I am grateful that he always appreciated

and supported the efforts of our medical team to help his people. He has remained a true friend over the years and I treasure his friendship.

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From Dr. Barbara Rose Johnston, an anthropologist who continues to investigate and document the hardship and suffering experienced by Marshallese as a result of the nuclear testing program: “I feel honored and privileged to have worked beside John for a short time and I am left with a strong memory from the last day of the Tribunal hearings (on consequential damages in November 2001). Judges and the defense team had left the room and John came up to me, with Abacca Anjain Maddison to translate, to say ‘Now I can die in peace. We won...In this hearing, and with our testimony, we won.’”

I do not know how long those feelings stayed with John, but I am glad that at least for that day he enjoyed some sense of accomplishment in his lifetime struggle to secure formal acknowledgment that injustices had occurred, that people continue to suffer as a result, and that some measure of meaningful remedy must be provided.

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*Yokwe yuk, John Anjain. Rest in peace, you deserved so much better.*

(Bill Graham is the Public Advocate at the Nuclear Claims Tribunal).

## Japanese mourn friend's death

Rongelap elder John Anjain was remembered by Japanese antinuclear leaders for being a selfless advocate for the people of Rongelap.

“In this age of nuclear horror, John had never thought of his own life first,” said Hiroshi Taka, secretary general of the Japan Council against A & H Bombs (Gensuikyo).

“He devoted all his life to warn the world of the nuclear danger, and save the lives of the Rongelap people, the rest of the Marshallese and of the whole world,” Taka said.

Just four months before his death, Anjain flew to Japan to attend the March 1st Bikini Day conference marking the 50th anniversary of the Bravo test. Taka said Anjain expressed the feeling that his travel might claim his life, but said this “would not be important”. To him, the lives of the people he cared were always far more important than his own, Taka said.

“Some weeks ago, I talked with him in hospital. I could not say much, but expressed my hope that he would do his best to get over the problem because we all would still need him.

“I want that he would be alive. With the depth of his commitment and nobleness, he is so rare a person that one is very fortunate if he/she can meet him in the lifetime. It was a great honor for me and for our movement that we had him as a very, very close friend in our common struggle for the life and dignity of the human race.”

Matashichi Oishi, a former crew member of the ‘Lucky Dragon’ — a fishing boat that was exposed to the Bravo fallout — said Anjain’s “anger had echoed in Japan and in the rest of the world. It also reached the hearts of fishermen of the 5th Lucky Dragon.”

Oishi said he was honored to make a recent visit to Rongelap with Anjain. “He talked about his childhood in Rongelap and the tragedy he and his people had to go through,” Oishi continued. “He said in a strong tone that Bikini incident must not be settled until all victims are compensated.

“His will and struggle, together with the tragic experiences of Rongelap people, must be handed down to young people and next generations to come. I hope the planned Rongelap Peace Museum will play this role.”

Oishi said that Anjain “was a great leader not only for Rongelap people but also for us in Japan.”