



**RELEASED: Thursday 23rd November 2017**

## **FOREIGN CORRESPONDENT: The Dome**

**Foreign Correspondent returns 8.30 pm  
Monday November 27 on ABC TV and iview**

**Rising sea levels threaten to flush a vast stash of highly radioactive plutonium into the Pacific Ocean. And as Mark Willacy reports, this is not the only toxic fallout from a legacy of US nuclear tests.**

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Runit is a far-flung coral speck surrounded by shimmering blue lagoons, a tiny outpost of the Marshall Islands.



It's also Ground Zero of the South Pacific or, as one Marshallese calls it, "*a big monument to a giant American fuck-up*".

Runit is dominated by what's called the Dome. It looks like the work of extra-terrestrials. But this is a man-made, sprawling concrete circle that encases tonnes of nuclear waste including about 400 lumps of plutonium, one the deadliest substances known to science.

Now the Dome is cracking and leaking. Storm tides flood over it. Seawater is inside it. The fear is that a typhoon will break the whole thing apart and spew its radioactive contents into the ocean.

*"That dome is the connection between the nuclear age and the climate change age. It'll be a devastating event if it really leaks. We're not talking just the Marshall Islands, we're talking the whole Pacific Ocean"*

**Alson Kelen, Marshallese community leader**

As reporter Mark Willacy discovers when he journeys to remote Runit, the Dome is a literal concrete example of America's cavalier treatment of the Marshall Islanders. Bikini is seared into history for the 23 atomic bomb tests carried out there. Yet at least 40 more were done at Enewetak atoll, which includes Runit, and other Marshalls atolls in the 1940s and 1950s.

Displaced Marshallese can't go home to contaminated islands. Many were burned by the fluttering fallout they called "snow". Despite a US\$2.3 billion compensation award, a mere US\$4 million has been paid out.

*"We're disposable. Our lives don't matter. War matters. Nuclear bombs matter"*

**Kathy Jetnil-Kijiner, poet and activist**

Not only the Marshallese feel disposable in Washington's eyes. When a bomb test at Runit misfired, leaving clumps of plutonium scattered over the island, someone had to clean it up. The job fell to US servicemen like Ken Kasik and Jim Androl in the late 1970s.

*"I was told I was going to a tropical paradise. I didn't know it was radioactive"*

**Jim Androl**

*"My whole vision in life was to live on a deserted tropical island. We were lied to"*

**Ken Kasik**

Kasik and Androl say the clean-up teams shifted radioactive muck for months on end without radiation-protective clothing. For years they have battled cancers which they blame on the clean-up, and which they say also affect a disproportionate number of Runit vets.

But they can't get extra help with medical bills because the US Government won't recognise them as atomic veterans.

*"The government put us in the middle of a danger zone. Our boys worked six-month tours on a dirty island and the government says 'You were never there'"* **Ken Kasik**

**Mark Willacy digs into the Dome and its dirty legacy when Foreign Correspondent returns at 8.30 pm Monday November 27 on ABC TV (repeated 1 pm Tuesday and 11.30 pm Wednesday on ABC TV; 8 pm Saturday and 1 am Sunday on ABC News). Also on iView.**

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