



# **The Ocean Was Our Lab**

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In January 1990, received my new assignment from Julian Jones: Marine Biology at Kwajalein that coming summer! Kwajalein? I was so excited!! I was going to the largest atoll in the world!

Kwajalein Atoll, a coral reef formation enclosing the world's largest lagoon, is located in the Marshall Islands, in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, approximately halfway between Honolulu and Manila. On the reef enclosing the lagoon are about 100 small islands. Kwajalein is one of the three largest islands in the atoll and the home of a large US Army Base

Dr. Jones added that most of my students were working for Lincoln Lab, the prestigious Lab from MIT.

My Marine Biology friends asked me to keep my eyes open for signs of deformity in marine animals, a possibility since Kwajalein is close to Enewetak and Bikini islands, sites of Atomic Bombs tests My students and I looked carefully at all forms of marine life we came across. I was happy to report that we did not see any sign of

body deformity....no creature with two heads, two tails, or unusual bumps

The process of getting clearance from the Pentagon to teach there was long and tedious. May arrived and I was on my way. I flew from Kadena to Kwajalein on an Air Force 141. Air Force 141 is a big military cargo plane with seats facing the rear of the aircraft. The dinner was a lunch box filled with sandwiches, fruit, and drinks, enough to feed a big hungry Marine. Approaching the atoll, I saw the gorgeous blue lagoon....what a view....

Madelain Westermann, UMAD Representative on site, met me at the airport and took me to a trailer, my home on "Kawj." The place was simple but had everything I needed. The most interesting feature was the toilet's water tank. Water pumped from the ocean was used to flush the toilet since fresh water was a precious commodity brought in by ship. I used this feature to keep marine life alive. I taught in the evening, and I used the morning to prepare the lesson, walk the beach, and pick up ocean life to bring to class. To keep the animals alive for the evening class, I placed them in the toilet tank until time to go to class.

After class I took them back to the ocean. Often we started class with a lecture in the classroom and continued on the reef.

Kwajalein was the site of a battle during WWII. The US Army won the battle and in 1944 captured the island from the Japanese. The bombing left big holes on the reef. Over the years, life settled there, and they became tidepools, teeming with life, our gorgeous aquaria!

One rumor there was that the Japanese shot down Amelia Earhart's airplane over this island, took Amelia and her co-pilot prisoners, and eventually killed them.

Kwajalein's very large lagoon is the missile range for missiles launched from Vandenberg Airforce Base in California. The missile's head is a ball of fire coming down from the sky and splashing in the water. What a sight!

I taught Marine Biology on other tropical islands, but none had such a great lab!

