The effects of America's Che

By Glenn Alcalay

Now that most of the radioactive debris from Chernobyl has settled back to earth — and the name Chernobyl has entered the world's lexicons — we may begin to assess the potential long-term health risks from history's worst nuclear power accident. For a glimpse into the future fate of the millions of prospective casualties caught in the fallout of the Ukrainian reactor, we may peer into the remote reaches of the Pacific where maimed islanders continue to live in a post-nuclear habitat downwind of Bikini Atoll in the Marshall Islands.

Since 1947, the Marshall Islanders (and the other people of Micronesia) have been administered by the United States under a soon-to-end U.N. Trust Agreement.

On March 1, 1954, the earth shook when the United States exploded its largest and "dirtiest" hydrogen bomb at Bikini. "Bikini," at 15-megatons, was 1,200 times the size of the relatively puny atomic bomb dropped over Hiroshima a decade before.

Within hours of detonation, dangerous radioactive particles blasted across the numerous inhabited islands far from the site of the behemoth blast. Caught in the lethal fallout 100 miles east of Bikini were the 86 people of Rongelap Atoll who, thinking it to be a sort of tropical "snow," dashed around in the hot ash which literally accumulated to 2 to 3 inches deep. After two days the unsuspecting islanders were evacuated from their home island until they eventually returned three years later in 1957.

Farther downwind — about 130 miles from the epicenter — 28 U.S. Air Force weathermen were monitoring the critical winds for the monstrous Bravo test. When the fallout descended, their Geiger counters went off scale; following an Atomic Energy Commission contingency plan, the men remained inside a small building in order to minimize their radiation exposures.

These men were likewise evacuated after two days of living in the path of the deadly radioactive plume. Mysteriously, these men never were given follow-up medical exams, but a recently released report from 1954 states that "upon discharge all 28 men were in a cheerful mood and it appeared that, in their minds, the incident was past history."

Farther eastward, about 300 miles from Bikini — the same distance, for example, as that which separates Philadelphia from the nearby Beaver Valley nuclear reactors in Western Pennsylvania — the 167 people of Utirik Atoll saw the bright equatorial morning sky fill with gritty dust hours after hearing the thunderous roar of the bomb. After three days they too were taken away from their contaminated island.

Initially, the islanders (and the U.S. weathermen) suffered from the symptoms of acute radiation exposure, including nausea, diarrhea, "beta" skin burns, loss of hair, and severely decreased white blood cell counts which led to weakened immune systems.

Soon afterward, several pregnant women suffered either miscarriages or stillbirths. Despite these occurrences, the U.S. government denies any link between the fallout and these current allegations of adverse birth outcomes.

In response to Bravo, the United States speedily set up annual surveys for the exposed Marshallers by a scientific team from Brookhaven National Laboratory and Lawrence Livermore Laboratory, ironically the very place where Bravo was designed by Dr. Edward Teller.

After many years it seemed that the effects from the fallout had diminished when, quite unexpectedly, a rash of thyroid abnormalities erupted a full decade after the 1954 blast. Numerous tumors appeared among the exposed islanders, and several children actually stopped growing due to dysfunctioning thyroid glands.

When the thyroid effect turned into an epidemic — which it continues to be 32 years later — Brookhaven researchers deduced that isotopes of iodine, principally I-131 (like that emitted from the damaged Three Mile Island reactor) were responsible for the thyroid damage.

It was learned that the iodine isotopes from the Bravo fallout concentrated about 5,000 times more efficiently in the thyroid gland than anywhere else in the body, and that babies in utero and children were far more susceptible to injury than adults.

Questioning communism

China’s students reject that old-tine

By Trudy Rubin

When students marched through Shanghai streets last week carrying a poster of the Statue of Liberty, it did not mean they wanted U.S.-style democracy. What did mean is that China's younger urban generation has lost its old religion — rigid belief in Marxism-Leninism. Mao Zedong's ideas. Chinese youngsters listen avidly to Voice of America, which isn't jammed, learn English and meet foreigners on the streets and at "English corners" in major cities, where English students meet to practice.

Foreign news clips are now shown on Chinese television, and foreign news magazines are available at news stands to anyone who can afford the price.
A well of teachers in retired military

By James J. Kilpatrick

Sgt. Ken Custer served for 26 years in the U.S. Army. Capt. Larry Grimes put in 34 years as a naval officer. Col. Ralph D. Waddell served for 26 years in the Air Force. What do they have in common? They all have retired, and they all have become teachers.

The three men are part of a growing corps of untapped talent for American education. They are cited in a brochure prepared by the U.S. Department of Education for distribution to military personnel around the world. The object of this promotional effort, jointly sponsored with the Department of Defense, is to encourage officers to seek a second career after retirement.

The program makes sense in every way, though you would never know it from the sour reaction of professional educationists. When the effort was launched three months ago, the announcement drew a sniping response from Samuel G. Sava, executive director of the National Association of Elementary School Principals: "Would Gen. Patton have made a good elementary school principal?"

Mary Hatwood Furlong, president of the National Education Association, was equally snippy. To retired military personnel who may seek new careers in teaching, "I say welcome aboard—but don't think it's going to be easy."

Gordon Cavelti, executive director of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, added his bit. Some retired officers might be able to teach, "but let's not be naive. Being a principal is something different. You can't lead something you don't understand."

Well, the answer to the rhetorical question about George Patton is, no, the general probably would have gone bananas as principal of an elementary school. As head of a tough inner city high school, it might have been a different matter, but the joint program is not aimed at officers of flag rank. It is aimed chiefly at officers in their middle 40s who have retired after 20 or more years in service. Such men and women have long, productive lives still ahead.

"We need them in our schools as teachers and administrators," said another participant, Col. Joseph J. Magel, West Point class of 1939, who has been a school principal in California. "They have the military walk into a classroom and set up shop."

State requirements will have to be met, but good potential teachers, said Magel, ought not to be turned away for lack of "paper credentials." Means should be found to bring qualified officers into school systems while they take courses in the techniques of teaching. A number of states already are doing this.

Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger is enthusiastic. Almost all commissioned officers—98 percent of them—have at least a bachelor's degree. More than two-thirds of them have a master's degree.

In one fashion or another, these officers have spent much of their lives doing exactly what teachers and principals do. They have been instructing young people, shaping them up, organizing programs for specific purposes. They have skills in mathematics, science and languages—skills much in demand in both public and private education.

Retiring military personnel ought not to be deterred by the hostility of a few hoi-polloi professionals. It is true that some teaching jobs demand thorough preparation. The best navy commander is likely to run aground in teaching first-graders how to read. But there is no reason on earth why an officer who has served for many years in Europe should be arbitrarily barred from teaching French or Spanish to high school students.

It is a curious thing about the professional educationists. They are imbued with the giddy notion that there is something mysterious, something truly arcane, something that is incomprehensible to outsiders, about the business of teaching.

"You cannot lead something you don't understand," the gentleman said. But what is there about being a principal that a retired army officer is incapable of understanding? The armed services, alas, have their equivalent of faculty committees; officers have to learn some of the skills of public relations; discipline has been part of their life. On with the program! Retired military personnel have done their part for their country. They ought to be