

This paper is an introduction to the following papers, which were presented at the symposium “A Song Among the Ruins: 50 Years of Japanese/Academy Cooperative Studies of Atomic Bomb Survivors,” organized by John E. Dowling and Alvin G. Lazen and held at the 134th Annual Meeting of the National Academy of Sciences on April 30, 1997.

An Introduction to “A Song Among the Ruins”

JOHN E. DOWLING

The Biological Laboratories, Harvard University, 16 Divinity Avenue, Cambridge, MA 02138

In November, 1946 James Forrestal, then Secretary of the Navy, wrote a letter to President Truman requesting

That the Presidential Directive instruct the National Academy of Sciences - National Research Council - to undertake a long range, continuing study of the biological and medical effects of the atomic bomb on man. That in this directive the council be authorized to enlist the aid of governmental agencies and personnel, and such civilian agencies and personnel as may be needed. Further, that those governmental agencies whose aid is requested by the Council be authorized and requested to provide the needed cooperation.

President Truman approved this request on November 26, 1946, and in early 1947, a program was established to study the

health effects of exposure to radiation from the atomic bombs at Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The program, first called the Atomic Bomb Casualty Commission, and then reorganized in 1975 as the U.S./Japan Binational Radiation Effects Research Foundation, is responsible for studies that have informed science about radiation effects and provided the basic information upon which guidelines for radiation protection are based. This Symposium describes the remarkable scientific achievements of that program and the unique cultural atmosphere that made the achievements possible. The title of the session, “A Song Among the Ruins,” is taken from Jack Schull’s lyrical account of his early experiences in Japan as a member of the Commission, published in 1990 by the Harvard University Press.

This symposium was co-organized by Alvin G. Lazen, the Director of Program Operations for the Commission on Life Sciences.