

Alpha Helix (ship) prepares for new NSF voyages

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Laboratories aboard the research vessel Alpha Helix, an experimental biological ship operated by the Scripps Institution of Oceanography, University of California, San Diego, and sponsored by the National Science Foundation, are being set in readiness in Honolulu for three upcoming NSF-funded medical programs, July 10, the R/V Alpha Helix will head for the Solomon, New Hebrides, Western Caroline Islands for scientific studies lasting six months.

A six-and-a-half week program on two remote islands in the Solomon group-- Ulawa and Ontong Java-- will begin the research. Headed by Albert Damon, M.D., of Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, a team of 12 scientists will make anthropological measurements and conduct functional tests of nearly a thousand natives, who live on the two islands.

The second program, scheduled for two months, involves 12 islands in the New Hebrides and Solomon Islands. A group under Carleton Gajdusek, M.D., of the National Institutes of Health, will collect specimens from sick and healthy natives and examine skin biopsies, culture viruses, and microorganisms from skin diseases and ulcers. The medical staff will also administer to the medical needs of the people.

Ronald Carr, M.D., of New York University, New York City, will lead an R/V Alpha Helix research team when it reaches Pingelap in the Caroline Islands. Here the scientists will look for a possible genetic linkage between a congenital eye disease that leads to total colorblindness and nearsightedness. The isolated Pingelap population appears to have a high incidence of these visual abnormalities.

Dr. Walter F. Garey of Scripps Institution of Oceanography manages the scientific program of the R/V Alpha Helix; Alan W. Phinney and Garrett S. Coleman will captain the ship during the six-months' period.

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