

## No Phone, No Lights, No Motorcars: A Tale of Project Castaway

By Jeffrey Bryson

In the year 1960, The Cold War was in full swing. Bomb shelters and the phrase “duck and cover” had seeped into the popular consciousness to such a degree that many Americans (including those in the government) felt that a nuclear war was inevitable. In fact, those in the know were all too aware that a recent chain of events that had nearly plunged the United States and U.S.S.R. into just such a conflict: A U.S. bomber pilot had been given incomplete commands during a training run, and nearly bombed Moscow before being shot down by Soviet fighters<sup>1</sup>. The intelligence community was in an uproar, and enormous sums of money were diverted towards secret research regarding the effects of an atomic conflict between two superpowers.

One major research push was oriented wholly towards how to rebuild a civilization following the coming war. A team of top psychologists, cultural anthropologists, geneticists, and other major scientists was assembled to determine the minimum basic requirements necessary to create a society more or less from scratch. It was determined that a typical shelter isolated at a safe distance from expected targets could hold approximately six individuals with minimum risk of discovery or security leaks. While this was hardly an ideal number to avoid inbred traits in future generations, it was also determined to be a practical starting point for a workable tribal structure. The hope was that the colony would eventually contact other, similar outposts, combining with them to rebuild America.

The research team determined that the following fields of knowledge and skill would have to be represented:

- A leader. Preferably an older individual to provide a fatherly/protective presence, and one with experience as an authority figure. He would additionally need to provide certain practical skills in order to maintain a balance of skill sets within the new society.
- A scientist/medic. This individual would need to be a polymath, with a working knowledge of numerous related and unrelated scientific fields.
- A farmer/butcher. Someone with extensive experience in the agricultural field, to be able to assist in wilderness survival.
- A merchant. This individual would be the “keeper of the flame” of the American ideal of capitalism.
- An artist or entertainer. This person would provide necessary morale for the group through entertainment, acting as a one-person USO. He or she would have to be multitalented, able to act, sing, dance, and otherwise provide a release from the

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<sup>1</sup> See Eugene Budrick’s 1962 novel *Fail-Safe*, as well as the 1964 movie and 2000 television movie of the same name. Additionally see *Dr Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying And Love The Bomb*, Stanley Kubrick’s 1964 film. While both of these films depicted a conclusion to the events far darker than the actual one, they each contained elements of the full story.

emotional pressures of isolation.

- A manual laborer. Someone to take care of the basic essentials, such as tinkering, sanitation, gathering, minor carpentry, and so on.

Also, further standards would have to be met in order to produce useful data: First, the area where the experiment took place would have to have a level of background radiation equivalent to what could be expected of survivors isolated from direct impact zones. Second, the subjects could at no time be made aware that they were part of an experiment. For the psychological data to have any use whatsoever, they would have to be under the impression that they were truly isolated from society, with little to no hope of rescue.

This report was filed away for future reference, one of millions of such studies funded during this era. And it would have remained a minor curiosity of a difficult period in American history if not for the efforts of a minor bureaucrat working in a subdivision of a major intelligence agency. Intrigued by the possibilities presented in the paper, he forwarded it to his superiors, who in turn forwarded it to gentlemen who worked behind the scenes of certain highly classified projects. Recent moves on the part of the Soviet bloc had caused them to consider nuclear conflict to be a near-inevitability, and a top secret team of researchers was assembled to put this plan into action.

The first task was to find a suitable location. After weeding through several prospects as being impractical or unworkable for their purposes, the team settled on a single island many miles off the coast of Oahu. The subjects would be led to believe that they were the victims of a shipwreck, as this would allow them to eventually be reintegrated into civilization. This would be accomplished through a combination of hypnosis and the administration of powerful narcotics. Recent intelligence from The People's Republic of China had shown similar techniques as having been impressively effective during the Korean War<sup>2</sup>.

The next major effort was to find the appropriate research subjects. With the exception of the scientist, the researchers looked specifically for low- to average-intelligence individuals. It was thought that highly intelligent people would prove less susceptible to the mind control techniques utilized in the scenario. Additionally, those of above-average intelligence would be less likely to find a way off of the island on their own, or to suspect that their shipwreck was anything more than it seemed to be.

After much heated discussion, it was also decided that the group would need an unsuspecting mole, one more deeply controlled than the rest of the subjects. He would be controlled by a deeply implanted hypnotic command to sabotage any rescue attempts on the part of other members of the experimental colony. Said sabotage would always appear to be an accident resulting from the clumsiness and/or lack of intelligence on the part of the controlled subject.

After searching through literally thousands of records, the following subjects were

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<sup>2</sup> As seen in Richard Condon's novel *The Manchurian Candidate*.

determined to be the most suitable for the experiment. It should be noted that some were picked for reasons beyond the scope of the project. I have given further details where applicable:

“Skipper” Jonas Grumby. A Navy veteran who had served in both World War II and the Korean conflict, Grumby brought extensive leadership abilities and mechanical engineering to the table. He came from a long line of seafarers, his father Ishmael having narrated his own adventures to author Herman Melville in the book *Moby Dick*.

Thurston Howell III and his wife Eunice. A former member of Roosevelt’s “Brain Trust” of the 1930’s (and a fan of the former president to the point of aping his speech patterns), Howell had turned away from liberalism after reading the works of Ayn Rand. A major figure in the business community, he had recently started to refuse government defense contracts as being “socialistic”. By making sure that he was out of the way, the government made sure that the business passed into the hands of his far more malleable cousin, the vain and myopic Quincy Magoo<sup>3</sup>. While Eunice Wentworth Howell (nee Wooster) was beyond childbearing years, the scientists determined that her absence could easily cause enough of a depression in her husband to render him ineffective.

Ginger Grant. Ginger was an up-and-coming starlet who had already received some critical raves for her roles in a series of B-Movies. However, she had followed in the footsteps of her idol Marilyn Monroe, and had started a series of affairs with prominent and powerful politicians. Sending her away from civilization kept their names from the gossip columns of the time.

Mary Ann Summers. A member of the Summers clan (and cousin once-removed of future Slayer Buffy Summers), Mary Ann was a premier farmer in her area. A winner of numerous 4-H club ribbons, veteran girl scout, experienced hunter and camper, and general wilderness survival expert.

Professor Roy Hinkley, Jr. Dr. Hinkley was a former lecturer at Miskatonic University in Arkham, Massachusetts. As a polymath, Hinkley was perfect for the role. He was well-versed in a variety of scientific and practical disciplines, including physics, meteorology, geology, botany, and several others. It should be noted that Hinkley’s role in the experiment has been the subject of much speculation, which will be addressed later in this article. Hinkley was the only other married subject besides the Howells, with three young girls<sup>4</sup>.

“Gilligan”. The man known as Gilligan continues to be the most difficult member of the group to research. A native of Hawaii, he had spent several years with other family members in the Midwest, where he had been sent by his father to learn “basic American values”. Instead, he became enamored of the works of the “beat” writers of the time, adopting the clothing style and mannerisms of members of that movement. Records of

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<sup>3</sup> See the television series *Famous Adventures of Mr. Magoo* and others with similar titles.

<sup>4</sup> It may be worthy of note that Dr. Hinkley was the uncle of schoolteacher Ralph Hinkley, whose adventures were chronicled in the television series *The Greatest American Hero*.

the time show his name as being “Maynard G. Krebs”. However, his father’s last name was Higgins, as shown by later evidence<sup>5</sup>. Additionally, Sherwood Schwartz (producer of the show chronicling the adventures of this group) has stated that the character’s name was “Willy Gilligan”. I have chosen to use the name “Gilligan” for the purposes of this article, and leave research into his actual name to other Wold-Newton scholars. This much is known: He was in his early 20’s, was well-regarded despite his inherent clumsiness, and obeyed orders to the best of his ability. This made him the perfect manual labor (despite his physical shortcomings), and, more importantly, the perfect subject to be the unconscious saboteur.

The next stage was to find a reason to assemble the subjects. It was determined that an offer of a tour of the Hawaiian islands on board Grumby’s ship *The Minnow* would provide sufficient enticement for a majority of them. The exception was Gilligan, who was given a job on board the ship as first mate through the machinations of government agents at the Hawaiian docks. Ginger was advised to go as research for an upcoming film. The Howells were informed of property investments in the islands, and were advised by “insiders” that the property could be best viewed from a stop on this tour. Mary Ann won an all-expenses paid trip to Hawaii in a hog-raising contest. Professor Hinkley had just returned from an archaeological dig in the Amazon, and was told by his superiors to take the trip to “unwind” while attending a conference on the island.

In the spring of 1960, *The Minnow* set off on what was meant to be a three-hour tour of the Hawaiian Islands. Some miles offshore, the ship was intercepted by a supposed Coast Guard vessel for inspection. The passengers and crew were taken off board, and transported to a Navy vessel off of Pearl Harbor. There they were subjected to the aforementioned mind control techniques, leaving the impression that they had been in an intense storm. Gilligan was given the “extra” treatment to turn him into the saboteur. Placed back on board the *Minnow* (which had been modified to represent the effects of a shipwreck), the subjects were then moved to the island, where they awoke some hours later.

Project Castaway had begun.

Certain provisions were made for the castaways. The first was that shortly after their marooning, a number of crates from a supposed shipwreck washed up on shore containing enough clothing and supplies for an extensive stay. The second involved certain modifications to the radio: It was set to only pick up a few stations, all of which were actually run by the researchers. This had the added benefit of allowing them to broadcast coded messages that would activate certain post-hypnotic suggestions implanted during the mind control process.

Over the course of the project, various members of the research team and other government agents were sent to the island to observe the progress of the society. They always went undercover as various people who had ended up on the island for any

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<sup>5</sup> See the movie *A Very Brady Sequel*. While Higgins is named “Mr. Whitehead” in this movie, even a casual watcher of the television series *Magnum, P.I.* will recognize him for who he is..

number of reasons, all of them finding ways to be “rescued”. Once the observers left, the castaways were fed news bulletins through the radio, all of them giving reasons that the observer failed in his or her attempt to pass on the information regarding their state.

Despite the intense secrecy surrounding the project, some leaks did occur. In 1963, producer Sherwood Schwartz was talking with a former government agent who was pitching screenplays in Hollywood. After a few glasses of wine, the agent’s tongue loosened, and he described the rumors he’d heard of seven stranded castaways. Schwartz later used the rough outlines of what he’d been told to pitch the series *Gilligan’s Island*, which became a great success. The security leak obviously caused much concern, but after dealing with the loose-lipped agent, the project decided that it would be best to allow the show to make it to air; Several previous classified incidents had been popularized in fictional form, and had caused the public to take all further accounts as equally fictitious. It was hoped that this rather silly situation comedy would prove just as effective a tool of disinformation.

Despairing of ever seeing her husband again, Hinkley’s wife Carol took her three daughters and remarried, moving in with her new husband and his own three boys<sup>6</sup>. In 1966, a young ne’er-do-well who had done work for Project Castaway in the boat sabotage used cosmetic surgery to look more like Professor Hinkley, and attempted to pass himself off as such to Carol in order to gain access to a South American artifact he had shipped to her. This attempt was ultimately unsuccessful, and the would-be thief was sent to prison<sup>7</sup>

The next several years were eventful for the castaways. Observers came to the island in guises ranging from a lost Japanese soldier, to a befuddled pilot, to a child raised by (amusingly enough for my fellow WNU researchers) jungle animals. The Professor, in conjunction with *The Skipper* and *Gilligan*, managed to construct impressive devices from wood from the native trees. A full kitchen was prepared, with Mary Ann teaching Ginger the basics of food preparation. Mr. And Mrs. Howell assisted to some degree with the organization and manual labor, though the scientists began to give second thought to their inclusion in the experiment.

A year into the project, the first possible complication arose. The castaways began to have vivid and disturbing dreams, casting themselves in various extreme roles. This was especially true of *Gilligan*, who began to exhibit a nearly schizophrenic attitude. It was theorized that the emotional stress of the situation was taking its toll, affecting *Gilligan* more deeply due to his more extreme mental reconditioning. As this posed little direct threat to the castaways, however, the project decided to take no immediate action.

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<sup>6</sup> See the television series and movie *The Brady Bunch*

<sup>7</sup> See the film *A Very Brady Sequel*. It should be noted that both “Brady” films were marketed as comedies, and therefore used several comic devices for the purposes of parody. One of these was to place the events of the movies in the 1990’s in order to provide a contrast with the 1960’s-70’s sensibilities of Carol and her new family. Oddly, however, the sequel was generally more accurate in its depiction of events than the television series, at least when it came to Carol’s former husband. This can largely be attributed to the director, who may have realized that nothing is funnier than the truth.

The second complication involved a neighboring island. The last anthropologists to visit them had reported a primitive tribal culture without the nautical technology to enable them to travel beyond their immediate waters. However, since that time, one tribe had made unbelievable strides in this area (It has been theorized that a force or entity hostile to the intentions of the project influenced the locals in some manner). They launched frequent attacks against the castaways. Fortunately, they were driven off each time.

The third complication was by far the most serious: By 1970, the castaways were not reproducing. While they had paired off in various combinations in a manner expected of healthy adults, no children had been born by nine years into the project. As all of the castaways with the exception of Mrs. Howell showed as fertile in their most recent medical checkups, another cause had to have been at work. An experimental disc-shaped miniature Geiger counter was placed on the island in the eleventh year of the project, and almost immediately detected that the background radiation was high enough to cause sterility in the castaways. The situation became even more complicated when Gilligan found the Geiger counter and adopted it as a good-luck charm. Finally, in what was considered to be the last straw, a major weather system was detected that was predicted to hit the island within the next two days<sup>8</sup>.

The project was immediately disbanded as a failure. Against the orders of his superiors, a team member managed to get a false “news report” out warning the castaways of the approaching storm.

On the island, the reaction was immediate. With little time, the Professor managed to design a craft composed of the materials from their shelters. Every castaway pitched in to lash them together. While they had previously voted down the idea of setting sail as impractical due to their distance from land, it was now a choice between a slim chance of survival and none at all. They lashed themselves to the support beams of the huts and allowed themselves to be washed to sea.

While they were afloat, Gilligan’s programming took over in the most destructive manner possible: Under the guise of cooking breakfast, he started a fire on board the makeshift raft. As the castaways attempted to extinguish the blaze, a navy helicopter spotted the smoke from the fire. They investigated and found the craft. After eleven years spent on a supposed three-hour tour, the castaways were rescued and returned to the mainland.

Their return was kept rather low-key, as opposed to the boisterous welcome portrayed in the television movie *Rescue From Gilligan’s Island*. The castaways were informed that a media circus could be upsetting to them while attempting to re-enter society. After extensive medical and psychological tests performed by undercover project agents, the castaways were released to begin their lives anew. This proved to be a remarkably difficult task. The world had changed significantly. The United States was embroiled in a difficult war, the moral landscape had changed with the advent of the sexual revolution, and the world seemed to have no place for seven individuals so obviously out of time.

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<sup>8</sup> See the television movie *Rescue From Gilligan’s Island*

Gilligan was finding his re-entry to be especially difficult. His programming was causing him to lose touch with reality, and he became obsessed with returning to the island. Towards this end, he invited his former islanders back to Hawaii for a one-year reunion. They all set sail in the Skipper's new boat, the *Minnow II* after much persuasion by Gilligan to revisit the site of their former captivity.

As soon as they got within sight of the island, Gilligan sabotaged the ship once again, his programming taking over completely. Again, the sabotage was chalked up to clumsiness on his part. The ship ran aground on a coral reef, and the passengers and crew swam the rest of the way to shore. Their treatment of Gilligan this time around differed greatly. Finally putting together that he was responsible for almost every ill turn of fortune that had befallen them to date (though still unaware of the reasons why), they exiled him from their immediate social circle. He spent the next month wandering the island, surviving off of knowledge gained in his earlier experience as a castaway.

In September of 1971, Gilligan came across a Koran War surplus cargo plane that had been left behind on the island by a project "cleaning crew" after developing mechanical problems<sup>9</sup>. This caused a complete breakdown for the man, his desire for escape conflicting with his long-standing programming. He ran screaming back to the huts, was intercepted by the others, and restrained. A search party was sent out. Grumby and Dr. Hinkley found the plane after retracing Gilligan's trail. After a few repairs, the engine roared to life. The castaways got on board, dragging along with them a still-restrained Gilligan. All of the passengers donned parachutes due to the makeshift repair job to the engine.

Almost at the moment that they climbed high enough to be spotted by radar, Gilligan managed to break free of his restraints, ran to the door, got it open despite the attempts to stop him, and leapt from the plane. Only a last survival instinct--what would prove to be the final shred of his sanity--caused him to pull the cord on his parachute. He landed off the island, swam back to shore, and sat on the beach in a catatonic state. The others discussed the issue, and decided to continue on (In the movie version of their second escape, they turned back and landed on the island again). The plane managed to stay airborne for long enough to appear on radar, and then developed engine trouble again. The Professor made an emergency water landing, with the passengers and crew barely escaping before the plane sank.

Within an hour, rescue boats were dispatched. The six on the plane were immediately brought on board ship. Gilligan was picked up two hours later, still catatonic. He was immediately taken to a mental health facility, and placed under the close observation of project-affiliated scientists.

The other castaways again tried to re-enter society. Ginger became an acting coach, The Skipper lived off of his Navy pension, the Professor returned to Miskatonic, Mary Ann to her family farm, and Mr. and Mrs. Howell spent their days in comfortable if somewhat

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<sup>9</sup> See the television movie *The Castaways on Gilligan's Island*.

dull retirement.

In 1978, tired of a life of leisure, Mr. Howell purchased the island from the United States government with the idea of opening a luxury hotel. His son Thurston Howell IV was placed in charge of the day to day operations, and the still out-of-place castaways were given highly paid positions. News of this reached Gilligan's ears during one of the Skipper's regular visits. He immediately snapped out of his catatonic state and began to scribble long, incoherent stories about him and his friends being marooned on a distant planet. These rants also eventually ended up in the hands of Schwartz, who used them as the basis of the cartoon series *Gilligan's Planet*.

In 1979, it was determined by Gilligan's doctors that he would benefit from a return to the island under certain controlled circumstances. The castaways had already long forgiven him, and happily accepted him as a custodial staff member at the Howell Island Luxury Resort. The next year, the resort played host to the Harlem Globetrotters<sup>10</sup>, who conducted an exhibition match against a group of artificially intelligent basketball-playing robots (The creator of the robots had a plan to kidnap the Globetrotters and steal their super-abilities, not realizing that the team had given them up in order to concentrate more on basketball two years previously). The Globetrotters won, much to the relief of the Howells, who had wagered the island in a bet with business rivals of theirs.

A final note regarding one of the castaways: It has been suggested by other scholars that Professor Hinkley knew exactly what was happening, and was indeed a member of Project Castaway. The general thought behind this theory is that such an intelligent and capable man as the Professor would have found a way off of the island at some point during the eleven years before the typhoon. While I admit that this is a minor mystery, the idea that Hinkley was involved in the project does not make sense for a simple reason: He had a wife and three golden-haired children who he loved deeply. A man with such a large family and such strong ties to them would not have been selected for this mission except under the most unusual circumstances, and it is highly doubtful that he volunteered to desert them indefinitely, no matter how much of a patriot he might have been.

Since the Globetrotters exhibition, the activities of this group become unclear. The last known news of the castaways had them still on the island, their former prison having become the only true home any of them knew.

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<sup>10</sup> See the television movie *The Harlem Globetrotters on Gilligan's Island*.

