The Nuclear Age's Blinding Dawn

On July 16, 1945, the United States detonated the first atomic bomb. The test, code-named Trinity, was the conclusion of the Manhattan Project to build the bomb in a frantic race with Adolf Hitler's scientists. The explosion ushered in the nuclear age, gave rise to New Mexico's modern economy, led to Japan's surrender and set off 50 years of debate about the morality of using such awesome force.

By Larry Ycallo

**TRITON: 50 YEARS LATER**

A historic explosion in southern New Mexico's desolate Jornada del Muerto heralded the end of a war and the beginning of a new world.

**By Richard Harkey**

"Everything suddenly got brighter than daylight. My dad thought of course the steam locomotive had blown up."  

S aul Harkey and his son, Richard, were standing in the glow before dawn on July 16, 1945, waiting for a train at Ancho, when the bomb went off. "I thought the train had gotten a little too close," says Saul. "But I didn't think it was an atomic explosion."  

Located in southern New Mexico's Jornada del Muerto, the Trinity Site is a memorial to atomic history. The site was the first atmospheric test of an atomic bomb on July 16, 1945. It was the world's largest atomic bomb test, and the first to exceed 20 kilotons of TNT. The explosion was so intense that it lit up the sky and startled the bejabbers out of early morning sleepers. The light was so bright that it was seen 60 miles away, and the sound traveled 90 miles. It was the world's first nuclear explosion and is considered the birth of the nuclear age.

**Innocence's end**

Trinity was a test of the atomic bomb's potential to change the world. The explosion was a turning point in human history, marking the beginning of the nuclear age. It was the first time that the power of the atom had been unleashed in a military context, and it set in motion a global arms race that would lead to the development of nuclear weapons.

**Desert lab**

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**Economic force**

Los Alamos National Laboratory was born to the race for the A-bomb. It has grown into a world-class economic force, changing the face of northern New Mexico in the past 50 years. From Page 6

**Bomb qualms**

New Mexico's National Laboratory scientists still debate whether the bomb used against Hiroshima and Nagasaki – and even the existence of nuclear weapons – is necessary. From Page 7

**Locals Witnessed History in a Flash**

This is a report of stories and photos published in the Albuquerque Journal on July 9-11 as part of the newspaper's coverage of the 50th anniversary of the first atomic bomb explosion at the Trinity Site.

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**RICHARD HARKEY**

**By Fritz Thompson**

**AWARD WINNER**

**TRITON: 50 YEARS LATER**

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**INNOCENCE'S END**

It seems quaint in retrospect. Top physicists assembled the aid of Scotch tape and Kleenex. But soon a deadly shadow fell over the bomb's creators.

**DESSERT LAB**

Theoretically, the atomic bomb was a sure enough bet to be dropped without a test. But some demanded proof: that Trinity was born. It was the world's largest lab test.

**ECONOMIC FORCE**

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**BOMB QUALMS**

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Ringside Seat to History

Unprecedented blast stunned N.M. residents into nuclear family

An Albuquerque Journal Special Reprint, July 1995

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No one knew what was going on out there. And of course none of us ever heard of Los Alamos or the atomic bomb.

The Manhattan Project (1942-1945)

Purpose: To make and test an atomic bomb and to keep the principles of nuclear fission secret.

Main Locations: Los Alamos scientific laboratory (Bombe design and construction), Hanford, Washtucna, Wash. (separation); Han- ford, Wash. (uranium production); Trinity Site (first explosion).

Cost: About $2 billion (about $900 million in 1939 dollars). Less than 5 percent spent at Los Alamos.


Ranchers and other residents on both sides of the Oscura Mountains had no idea. The whole world was in a state of shock.

“Hell, that’s our ranch!”

Richard Pipes/JOURNAL

Pat Withers lives south of Carrizozo. He is 54 years old. He remembers the blast, “I was standing near this steam locomotive had blown up. Then you could see it was an atomic bomb. Los Alamos or the atomic bomb.”

He and her late husband, Dean Fite, were moved off what was later called the “black and white.” Pat Withers says, “all those people,” she says, “grew up and neighbors visited the site soon after. “We saw it and it was hard to believe it. The tower was the first thing we saw. We couldn’t tell from the news accounts what had happened. And of course none of us ever heard of Los Alamos or the atomic bomb.”

The tower, “It was a blinding flash and it lasted at least a full minute,” Richard says. “We did-”

Evelyn Fite Tune and her friends and neighbors visited the site soon after. “We saw it and it was hard to believe it.”

“My grandmother thought it was the end of the world,” remembers Rowena Baca, who runs the Owl Bar in San Antonio. Baca and her family were among few Mexicans who saw the sky suddenly turn red 50 years ago when scientists set off the Trinity blast.

“People weren’t afraid of the government. Well, we had no idea what radioactiv-”

Richard was not even a child at the time.

The blast was amazing. The sky suddenly turned red. It illuminated the inside of the black box out by the stock tank. I went back to bed.”

Richard pipes/JOURNAL

Mushroom cloud rising from land her cattle once grazed.

Dolly Onsrud was, like, the sun was coming up in the three years earlier.

Sparkey, the stationmaster, was out on the train so Richard, then 18, could board and ride to his job in Tucumcari.

The lone exception was the late José Miera, proprietor of the Owl Bar in San Antonio. Baca and Onsrud recalled the blast.

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Richard pipes/JOURNAL

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The whole filter seemed to light up as bright as the sun. I was temporarily blinded. The Ocuna Mountains were as bright as daylight.

The test's success proved that I had tapped into the standards of the time. The test was shrouded in secrecy, but within weeks, the world would know what science had wrought in a long, hot summer of Nuevo Mexico.

Jack Abey shows the color photo of the shot of the explosion and a camera like the one he used.