MEMORANDUM FOR THE SECRETARY OF WAR.

WAR DEPARTMENT
WASHINGTON

18 July 1945

SUBJECT: The Test.

1. This is not a concise, formal military report but an attempt to recite what I would have told you if you had been here on my return from New Mexico.

2. At 0530, 16 July 1945, in a remote section of the Alamogordo Air Base, New Mexico, the first full scale test was made of the implosive type atomic fission bomb. For the first time in history there was a nuclear explosion.

And was an explosion!

The bomb was not dropped from an airplane but was exploded on a platform on top of a 100-foot high steel tower.

3. The test was successful beyond the most optimistic expectations of anyone. Based on the data which it has been possible to work up to date, I estimate the energy generated to be in excess of the equivalent of 15,000 to 20,000 tons of TNT; and this is a conservative estimate. Data based on measurements which we have not yet been able to reconcile would make the energy release several times the conservative figure. There were tremendous blast effects.
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For a brief period there was a lightning effect within a radius of 20 miles equal to several suns in midday; a huge ball of fire was formed which lasted for several seconds. This ball mushroomed and rose to a height of over ten thousand feet before it dimmed. The light from the explosion was seen clearly at Albuquerque, Santa Fe, Silver City, El Paso and other points generally to about 100 miles away. The sound was heard to the same distance in a few instances but generally to about 100 miles. Only a few windows were broken although one was some 125 miles away. A massive cloud was formed which surged and billowed upward with tremendous power, reaching the stratosphere at an elevation of 41,000 feet, 36,000 feet above the ground, in about five minutes, breaking without interruption through a temperature inversion at 17,000 feet which most of the scientists thought would stop it. Two supplementary explosions occurred in the cloud shortly after the main explosion. The cloud contained several thousand tons of dust picked up from the ground and a considerable amount of iron in the gaseous form. Our present thought is that this iron ignited when it mixed with the oxygen in the air to cause these supplementary explosions. Huge concentrations of highly radioactive materials resulted from the fission and were contained in this cloud.

4. A crater from which all vegetation had vanished, with a diameter of 1200 feet and a slight slope toward the center, was formed. In the center was a shallow bowl 130 feet in diameter and 6 feet in depth. The material within the crater was deeply pulverized dirt. The material within the outer circle is greenish and can be distinctly seen from as much as 5 miles away. The steam from the tower was evaporated. 3500 feet away there was a four-inch iron pipe 16 feet high set in concrete and strongly gusted. It disappeared completely.
3. One-half mile from the explosion there was a massive steel test cylinder weighing 220 tons. The base of the cylinder was solidly encased in concrete. Surrounding the cylinder was a strong steel tower 70 feet high, firmly anchored to concrete foundations. This tower is comparable to a steel building key that would be found in typical 15 or 20 story skyscraper or warehouse construction. Forty tons of steel were used to fabricate the tower which was 70 feet high, the height of a six story building. The cross bracing was much stronger than that normally used in ordinary steel construction. The absence of the solid walls of a building gave the blast a much less effective surface to push against. The blast tore the tower from its foundations, twisted it, ripped it apart and left it flat on the ground. The effects on the tower indicate that, at that distance, unshielded permanent steel and masonry buildings would have been destroyed. I no longer consider the Pentagon a safe shelter from such a bomb. Enclosed are a sketch showing the tower before the explosion and a telephotograph showing what it looked like afterwards. None of us had expected it to be damaged.

4. The cloud traveled to a great height first in the form of a ball, then mushroomed, then changed into a long trailing chimney-shaped column and finally was sent in several directions by the variable winds at the different elevations. It deposited its dust and radioactive materials over a wide area. It was followed and monitored by medical doctors and scientists with instruments to check its radioactive effects. While here and there the activity on the ground was fairly high, at no place did it reach a concentration which required evacuation of the population. Radio-
Active material in small quantities was located as much as 100 miles away. The measurements are being continued in order to have adequate data with which to protect the Government's interests in case of future claims. For a few hours I was not too comfortable about the situation.

7. For distances as much as 100 miles away, observers were stationed to check on blast effects, property damage, radioactivity and reactions of the population. While complete reports have not yet been received, I now know that no persons were injured nor was there any real property damage outside our Government area. As soon as all the voluminous data can be checked and correlated, full technical studies will be possible.

8. Our long range weather predictions had indicated that we could expect weather favorable for our test beginning on the morning of the 17th and continuing for four days. This was almost a certainty if we were to believe our long range forecasters. The prediction for the morning of the 16th was not so certain but there was about an 80% chance of the conditions being suitable. During the night there were thunder storms with lightning flashes all over the area. The test had been originally set for 0400 hours and all the night through, because of the bad weather, there were urgings from many of the scientists to postpone the test. Such a delay might well have had crippling results due to mechanical difficulties in our complicated test set-up. Fortunately, we disregarded the urgings. We held fire and waited the night through hoping for suitable weather. We had to delay one hour and a half, to 0530, before we could fire. This was 30 minutes before sunrise.
9. Because of bad weather, our two B-29 observation airplanes were unable to take off as scheduled from Kirtland Field at Albuquerque and when they finally did get off, they found it impossible to get over the target because of the heavy clouds and the thunder storms. Certain desired observations could not be made and while the people in the airplanes saw the explosion from a distance, they were not as close as they will be in action. To still have no reason to anticipate the loss of our plane in an actual operation although we cannot guarantee safety.

10. Just before 1:00 the news stories from all over the state started to flow into the Albuquerque Associated Press. I then directed the issuance by the Commanding Officer, Kirtland Air Base of a news release as shown on the inclosure. With the assistance of the Office of Censorship we were able to limit the news stories to the approved release supplemented in the local papers by brief stories from the many eyewitnesses not connected with our project. One of these was a blind woman who saw the light.

11. Brigadier General Thomas F. Farrell was at the control shelter located 10,000 yards south of the point of explosion. His impressions are given below:

The scene inside the shelter was dramatic beyond words. In and around the shelter were some twenty-old people concerned with last minute arrangements prior to firing the shot. Included were: Dr. Oppenheimer, the Director who had borne the great scientific burden of
developing the weapon from the raw materials made in Tennessee and
Washington and at dozen of his key assistants -- Dr. Klausmey, who
developed the highly special explosive; Dr. Halverson, who supervised
all the detailed arrangements for the test; Dr. Hubbard, the weather
expert, and several others. Besides these, there were a handful of
soldiers, two or three Army officers and one Naval officer. The shelter
was cluttered with a great variety of instruments and radars.

For some hours two hours preceding the blast, General Groves
stayed with the Director, walking with him and steadying his tense
excitement. Every time the Director would be about to explode because
of some untoward happening, General Groves would take him off and walk
with him in the rain, consoling with his and reassuring him that
everything would be all right. At twenty minutes before zero hour,
General Groves left for his station at the base camp, first because
it provided a better observation point and second, because of our rule
that he and I must not be together in almost no were there is an
element of danger, which existed at both points.

Just after General Groves left, announcements began to be
broadcast of the interval remaining before the blast. They were sent
by radio to the other groups participating in and observing the test.
As the time interval grew smaller and changed from minutes to seconds,
the tension increased by leaps and bounds. Everyone in that room
knew the awful potentialities of the thing that they thought was about
to happen. The scientists felt that their figuring must be right and
that the bomb had to go off but there was in everyone's mind a strong
measure of doubt. The feeling of many could be expressed by "Lord, I
believe; help Thou mine unbelief." We were reaching into the unknown
and we did not know what might come of it. It can be safely said that
most of those present—Christian, Jew and Atheist—were praying and pray-
ing harder than they had ever prayed before. If the shot were successful,
it was a justification of the several years of intensive effort of tens of
thousands of people—statesmen, scientists, engineers, manufacturers, sol-
diers, and many others in every walk of life.

"In that brief instant in the remote New Mexico desert the
tremendous effort of the brains and brawn of all these people came
suddenly and startlingly to the fullest fruition. Dr. Oppenheimer, on
whom had rested a very heavy burden, grew tense as the last seconds
ticked off. He scarcely breathed. He held on to a post to steady him-
self. For the last few seconds, he stared directly ahead and then when
the announcer shouted "Now!" and there came this tremendous burst of
light followed shortly thereafter by the deep growling roar of the ex-
losion, his face relaxed into an expression of tremendous relief.

Several of the observers standing back of the shelter to watch the
lighting effects were knocked flat by the blast.

"The tension in the room let up and all started congratulating
each other. Everyone sensed "This is it!" No matter what might happen
now all knew that the impossible scientific job had been done. Atomic
fission would no longer be hidden in the cloisters of the theoretical
physicists' dreams. It was almost full grown at birth. It was a great
new force to be used for good or for evil. There was a feeling in
that shelter that those concerned with its activity should dedicate
their lives to the mission that it could always be used for good and
never for evil.

Dr. Kistiakowsky, the impulsive Russian, threw his arms
around Dr. Oppenheimer and embraced him with shouts of glee. Others
were equally enthusiastic. All the pent-up emotions were released
in those few minutes and all seemed to sense immediately that the ex-
ploration had far exceeded the most optimistic expectations and wildest
hopes of the scientists. All seemed to feel that they had been present
at the birth of a new age—The Age of Atomic Energy—and felt their
profound responsibility to help in guiding into right channels the
tremendous forces which had been unlocked for the first time in history.

As to the present war, there was a feeling that no matter
what else might happen, we now had the means to insure its speedy con-
clusion and save thousands of American lives. As to the future, there
had been brought into being something big and something new that would
prove to be immeasurably more important than the discovery of electricity
or any of the other great discoveries which have so affected our exis-
tence.

The effects could well be called unprecedented, magnificent,
beautiful, stupendous and terrifying. No man-made phenomenon of such
tremendous power had ever occurred before. The lighting effects be-
garded description. The whole country was lighted by a searing light
with the intensity many times that of the midday sun. It was golden, purple, violet, gray and blue. It lit up every peak, crevice and ridge of the nearby mountain range with a clarity and beauty that cannot be described but must be seen to be imagined. It was that beauty the great poets dream about but overrite most poorly and inadequately. Thirty seconds after the explosion came first, the air blast pressing hard against the people and things, to be followed almost immediately by the storm, caused an awesome roar which seemed of doom-day and made us feel that we were insensible to dare tamper with the forces hereofore reserved to The Almighty. Words are inadequate tools for the job of communicating those not present with the physical, mental and psychological effects. It had to be witnessed to be realized.

12. My Impressions of the Night's Highlights Follow:

After about 10 hours sleep I got up at 0200 and from that time on until about five I was w/ Dr. Oppenheimer constantly. Naturally he was nervous, although his mind was working at its usual extraordinary efficiency. I devoted my entire attention to shielding him from the excited and generally faulty advice of his assistants who were more than disturbed by their excitement and the uncertain weather conditions. By 0900 we decided that we could probably fire at 0930. By 0800 the rain had stopped but the sky was heavily overcast. Our decision became firmer as time went on. During most of these hours the two of us journeyed from the control house out into the darkness to look
at the stars and to assure each other that the one or two visible
stars were becoming brighter. At 0610 I left Dr. Oppenheimer and re-
turned to the main observation point which was 77,000 yards from the
point of explosion. In accordance with our orders I found all personal
not otherwise occupied massed on a bit of high ground.

At about ten minutes of the scheduled firing time all persons
lay face down with their feet pointing towards the explosion. As the
remaining time was called from the loud speaker from the 10,000 yard
control station there was complete silence. Dr. Comant said he had
never imagined seconds could be so long. Most of the individuals in
accordance with orders shielded their eyes in one way or another. There
was then this burst of light of a brilliance beyond any comparison. We
all rolled over and looked through dark glasses at the ball of fire.
About forty seconds later came the shock wave followed by the sound,
either of which seemed startling after our complete astonishment at
the extraordinary lighting intensity. Dr. Comant reached over and we
shook hands in mutual congratulations. Dr. Bush, who was on the other
side of me, did likewise. The feeling of the entire assembly was
similar to that described by General Farrell, with even the uninitiated
feeling profound awe. Drs. Comant and Bush and myself were struck by
an even stronger feeling that the faith of those who had been responsible
for the initiation and the carrying on of this Herculean project
had been justified. I personally thought of Blain's crossing Singapore
Falls on his tight rope, only to see this tight rope had lasted for almost
three years and of my repeated confident-appearing assurances that such a thing was possible and that we would do it.

13. A large group of observers were stationed at a point about 27 miles north of the point of explosion. Attached is a memorandum written shortly after the explosion by Dr. H. O. Lawrence which may be of interest.

14. While General Farrell was waiting about midnight for a commercial airplane to Washington at Albuquerque—120 miles away from the site—he overheard several airport employees discussing their reaction to the blast. One said that he was out on the parking apron; it was quite dark; then the whole southern sky was lighted as though by a bright sun; the light lasted several seconds. Another remarked that if a few exploding bombs could have such an effect, it must be terrible to have them drop on a city.

15. My liaison officer at the Alamogordo Air Base, 60 miles away, made the following report:

There was a blinding flash of light that lighted the entire northeastern sky. In the center of the flash, there appeared to be a huge billow of smoke. The original flash lasted approximately 10 to 15 seconds. As the first flash died down, there arose in the approximate center of where the original flash had occurred an enormous ball of what appeared to be fire and closely resembled a rising sun that was three-fourths above a mountain. The ball of fire lasted approximately 15 seconds, then died down and the sky resumed an almost normal appearance.
Memorandum for Secretary of War
16 July 1945

"Almost immediately, a third, but much smaller, flash and
hollow of smoke of a whitish-orange color appeared in the sky, again
lighting the sky for approximately 4 seconds. At the time of the
original flash, the field was lighted well enough so that a newspaper
could easily have been read. The second and third flashes were of
much lesser intensity.

"We were in a glass-enclosed control tower some 70 feet above
the ground and felt no concussion or air compression. There was no
noticeable earth tremor although reports overheard at the Field during
the following 24 hours indicated that some believed that they had both
heard the explosion and felt some earth tremor."

16. I have not written a separate report for General Marshall as
I feel you will want to show this to him. I have informed the necessary
people here of our results. Lord Halifax after discussion with Mr.
Harries and myself stated that he was not sending a full report to his
government at this time. I informed him that I was sending this to
you and that you might wish to show it to the proper British representa-
tives.

17. We are all fully conscious that our real goal is still before
us. The battle test is what counts in the war with Japan.

18. May I express my deep personal appreciation for your congratula-
tory cable to us and for the support and confidence which I have received
from you ever since I have had this work under my charge."
Memorandum for Secretary of War

28 July 1942.

10. I know that Colonel Ayle will guard these papers with his customary extraordinary care.

L. H. MERTON,
Major General, USA.

4 Enclosures:
Sketch
Picture
News Releas
Statement by E. O. Lawrence
JULY 16, 1945

170° Course away

$O = 5'30''$ A.M.

Looking toward 80°

$5'30''$ A.M.

about 24,000 ft.

and descend.

dark brown

light gray

150°

Looking toward 160°

$5'12''$ A.M.

clouds, heavy.

light gray

light gray