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Los Alamos
NATIONAL LABORATORY
memorandum

Chemical and Laser Science Division
Environmental Restoration Program

To/MS: OU 1082 Files, CLS-DO
From/MS: ~~OU 1082 Team~~ MARTIN, B. AND D. HICKMOTT
Phone/FAX: 7-8752/5-4632
Symbol: CLS-ER/BM-93:022
Date: May 6, 1993

Subject: **EARLY S-SITE HISTORY. MELVIN BROOKS INTERVIEW**

This memorandum outlines a discussion with Melvin Brooks on April 30, 1993 that occurred in the TA-35-268 conference room. OU 1082 Team Members Brad Martin, Donald Hickmott, Elroy Miller, Randy Ryti, and Dorothy Hoard attended. Members of the OU 1085 team attended for a few minutes. Brooks worked for Laboratory groups X-2, GMX-2 and GMX-3. He was a staff member in group X-2 during WWII and later the group leader of X-2, GMX-2, and GMX-3. There were approximately 325 people in group GMX-3; they performed Engineering and R & D, particularily of HE mixtures and implosion assemblies. He served in the last capacity for 17 years. Brooks arrived at Los Alamos in November 1944. He had previously worked at the Metallurgical Laboratory in Chicago.

During WWII Brooks worked in the southern part of S-Site, where X-2 explosives development activities occurred. Later, as group leader, his office was in the Technical Area and in the S-Site Administration area.

Brooks, primarily discussed specific activities that occurred in individual buildings, particularly in the GMX-2 area. These included:

TA-16-15 and other laundries: Laundries are likely to have had HE contamination in drains because the workers' clothing became contaminated with HE, particularly during casting operations.

TA-16-36: Brooks worked in this facility. It was used for developmental casting. He stated that the building had some special facilities, including elaborate control systems and instrumentation, in order to solve the cavitation problem of the inner charge of the implosion device. This work included developmental work on cyclotols. He stated that TA-16-37 was the cleaning bay.

TA-16-38: This building was used for machining and for casting. Brooks stated that this facility often handled unusual HE such as plumbatol, and light-element-containing HE such as boracitol.

TA-16-41: This building was stated to be a possible site of an analytical building.

TA-16-49: This building was used as an analytical laboratory. Properties of HE were measured herein. These properties included HE viscosities, wetting angles, densities, and compositions. A major goal of these analyses was to confirm that homogeneous HE charges were being produced in the experimental facilities of X-2/GMX-2. HE mixtures for small batches (melts) (baratol, cyclotols) were blended in this building prior to casting. Cleaning of HE-contaminated materials

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occurred each day, the wash water went to the sumps. Brooks stated that a wide range of chemicals were probably used in the building; he specifically mentioned acetone and benzene. He stated mercury was not used in density determinations.

TA-16-50: This building was used for developmental casting. This and other casting building are likely to be contaminated, they were washed daily with high-pressure steam/hot water mixtures. This wash material mostly went into the sumps, but some may have gone through cracks in the floor and out door seams.

TA-16-52: This building was also used for experimental casting. This and other casting building are likely to be contaminated, they were washed daily with high-pressure steam/hot water mixtures. This wash material mostly went into the sumps.

TA-16-53: This building was used for machining HE. Brooks worked in this building. He machined some of the inner charges of the Trinity device here using a special tool attached to a drill press.

TA-16-56: This building was used for mechanical testing of HE charges.

TA-16-83 and TA-16-86: These were used for curing charges of certain HE and annealing charges that were subject to cracking. Brooks recalled a specific incident when a plumbatol charge was burned. They contained temperature controlled ovens, no plumbing or sumps were associated with the buildings.

TA-16-93: The plating facility was used to electroplate HE with nickel and other metals.

Brooks suggested that most sumps drained to the open air, rather than to the subsurface. He stated that the water was often red due to the presence of TNT. He stated that during WWII the sumps did not contain cloth bags, rather they were setting basins that had to be shoveled out. He stated that unusual HE (plumbatol, PGT) were all used exclusively in the GMX-2 area, not in the northern GMX-3 area.