

Van Vesseem 1992
ER ID # 15073

Los Alamos

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memorandum

TO: C. K. Rofer, EES-1, MS D462
DATE: November 4, 1992

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SYMBOL: EES-1

SUBJECT: MATERIAL DISPOSAL AT TWO MILE MESA

I came to Los Alamos on March 13, 1944, as a member of the Army Special Engineer Detachment. I was assigned to Group X-2b, whose mission at the time was development of methods for recovery of active material from the Trinity shot, in case the conventional explosives detonated without a nuclear detonation. This group's mission later involved the assembly of the Fat Man device for the Trinity shot and the assembly of the Fat Man weapon, which was detonated over Nagasaki, Japan.

In the recovery effort, I worked on the Jumbo and Jumbino tests and on the water recovery method tested in the large concrete bowl (TA-6-37) on Two Mile Mesa. After the war ended, I went to Bikini Atoll to participate in testing there, and on returning from there in 1946, I joined Group X-7, which was located at Two Mile Mesa Site and TD Site. I continued with this group, which was later designated GMX-7, WX-7, and M-7, until my retirement in 1981.

This memo is in response to a draft memo dated October 6, 1992, by L. W. Creamer, which summarizes documentation on disposal pits on Two Mile Mesa.

My recollection of disposal practices at Two Mile Mesa is that all disposal pits were dug in the general area of the fences now designated Materials Disposal Area F (MDA F). I recall the 1946 pit very well. It was used for the burial of large obsolete classified non-explosive components, such as bomb casings, that were difficult to destroy in other ways. I have no recollection of the 1947 burial pit, but feel quite sure it again was used only for non-explosive obsolete classified objects. I also have no recollection of Job Orders for pits 6' x 6' x 6' and 2' x 2' x 4'.

Some of the documentation refers to the possibility of high explosives having been buried in these pits. Safety rules at Los Alamos have required that high explosives be disposed of by burning or detonation, and I do not recall exceptions to these rules.

Spark gaps listed in memos by C. Kunz were disposed of in holes drilled in the ground, in the area of the smaller fence at MDA F.

I talked to R. W. Drake on October 24 and 29, 1992 about disposal on Two Mile Mesa. Drake was the Assistant Division Leader of X Division, later GMX, WX, and finally some of the groups in M Division. He came to Los Alamos in 1948. He stated that he recalled the 1949 burial pit memo and said he remembered that this was mainly for burying classified X-Units (Fat Man firing units). Again, the purpose of burying these units was to protect their classification. They were primarily electronic and contained nothing more hazardous than solder. The fact that Charles Kunz was the contact tends to confirm this, since he was the X-7 Section Leader for Detonator Firing.

I mentioned to Drake that there were rumors that HE had been buried in these pits. He stated, as I did, that Division policy was burning or detonating as the only means of destroying explosives.



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