

TA 40

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Interview with John Tucker 4/21/86

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In 1945 John Tucker came to Los Alamos from Oak Ridge as a member of the Navy and was placed in Fussell's X-5 group. This group designed and built firing units, at least some of which were shipped to Raytheon in Mass. for completion of the unit.

Mr Tucker spent part of the time at Wendover and the Salton Sea before being sent to the Pacific. Rather than fly the "fat man mission" himself he trained the firing person for the drop because it had been decided to include as many people as possible who didn't know about the technical details (in order to reduce risk if captured).

After the war Mr Tucker continued to work on detonators at Los Alamos. Both G-7 located at the NW corner of South Mesa and X-7 located at Two Mile Mesa made detonators. The South Mesa location was probably in front of the present firehouse where the main road is now. They had a recrystallization section but Mr. Tucher does not know how liquids were disposed of. He remembers no sumps, burning grounds, or other disposal grounds on South Mesa. William A. McDonald (929 Tewa Lp. 662-3405) was in charge of PETN work and may know of sumps etc. Larry Johnson (who went to Cornell) was also in the group. Mr Tucker worked for Bob Spaulding (2927 A Villa 662-4603).

At Two Mile Mesa Walt Meyers was in charge of PETN preparation. The three concrete firing chambers in back of the main bldg. were used for testing detonators and detonator components. The air tank located outside the far east chamber was used to drive a camera. The sanitary drain from this bldg. is probably not HE contaminated.

Testing was also done at the Anchor Range.

In 1948-1949 the South Mesa group moved to TD site (TA-22) in order for new facilities to be constructed at what would become the main tech area. At TD site bldg. 25 was used to reprecipitate PETN and has an HE drain (Walt Meyers should know location). Bldg 34 has an acid drain going to the north. Probably all kinds of chemicals were put down this drain (Bob Dinigar M-7 7-6804 should know). There is adjacent to this drain an HE drain with catchment sump which decants to the "cattail area". The bldg. also has a sanitary drain. Bldg 1 has a sump/well filled with rocks into which PETN residues were flushed. This is probably the region which now has the explosives signs (south of bldg. 1). In bldg. 52 they installed the "most modern plating shop in the West". In the initial work they did mostly gold plating. Mr. Tucker does not know what was in the solutions discharged to the outfall south of the bldg. He feels that there maybe a tank between the bldg. and actual outfall. Mr. Tucker believes that septic tank 51 served the bldgs. near it after site renovation. After the renovation these bldgs. did not contain HE and thus tank 51 should not be HE contaminated. Septic tank 42 he is not sure about.

Mr Tucker helped in the design and development of TA-40. Explosive limits were as follows: bldg. 15-50lb, bldg. 12-10lb., bldg 9-Jerry Wackerle's gun, bldgs. 4-5 -25 lb., bldg. 8-10lb. There are probably small pieces of HE from these

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chambers and firing pads which has been scattered. The back end of bldg. 1 could be used for very small "dump firing" and electrical repair.

To dispose of detonators they initially used the northern most firing pit at TA-7. The siren and electrical equipment at the road turnoff are remains from these operations. They would fire a large piece of scrap HE to destroy the detonators. On

cloudy days the shot could be heard a great distance, rattling windows etc. The decision was made to move them to the eastern firing pit at TA-40. Here later on they used nitromethane (probably starting in the 60's) for detonator destruction. One shot scattered detonators and they went out and picked them up.

On the way to this disposal firing site Mr. Tucker would see a long trench (Area F). He believes the trench was deep because bulldozers were in use. He thinks tools, cables, and other items believed to be possibly HE contaminated were placed in the trench. He does not remember the smaller site nearer the road.

Mr. Tucker had no information on the site between the bowl and TA-40.