MARVIN R. DAVIS
301 Bird Street
Bartonville, Illinois 61607

Trinity

The trucks were pretty well loaded on December 29th. We got the horses loaded the next morning and we left. Along the road south of Belen, we stopped to eat our K-ration lunch. That is when Lt. Bush told us that we were going to the Almogordo Bombing Range. He said that we would see some strange structures and we were not to talk or write about anything we saw there.

We went on south through Socorro and came to San Antonio, where we crossed the Rio Grande and headed east on what is now Route 380. After a few miles we came to a cattle guard across the road. Just past that we turned south into the desert. I believe it was 29 miles to Base Camp.

It was not long before we saw one of those structures. One of the steel guard towers, one hundred feet tall, that were placed at four strategic points to keep an eye on the range. We got into Base Camp after dark and the power was not on. There was a man from the Albuquerque Engineer District there and he showed us how to start the generators. The beds were not set up in the barracks, so we slept on mattresses on the floor.

The barracks looked like they were used in WWI. The wood had been painted at one time but the wind and the sand had it completely bare. The glass window panes were so sandblasted you could hardly see through them.

The first few weeks we took turns going back up to the Hill to haul back beds and other supplies for the quarters of the people that were going to be working down there. Those left in Camp patrolled the Range, blocked off roads and put up signs. We had to do a lot of things for ourselves at first. Sgt. Sam Barnett and I got a bulldozer going and dug a garbage pit. We also kept the vehicles serviced. When the cook took a trip up to the Hill, someone had to cook, Lt. Bush even volunteered. I got stuck with the job when they found out I could cook, but it was not too bad because there would only be about six or eight men left in camp when trips were made up to the Hill.

In the booklet, "Los Alamos 1943 to 1945", on page 33, you can see the shelter we made for the horses and the blacksmith shop. The shop building was at an old abandoned mine about two miles east of Base Camp. We put it on skids and pulled it over to the corrals and fixed it up to be used as the blacksmith and

saddle shops. The saddle shop also served as the barber shop. When we got too shaggy one of the fellows used the horse clippers and gave us a rough haircut.

Our drinking water was hauled in from Socorro, but the rest came from one well with a windmill. They soon found that the well would not provide enough for the horses and the latrine. The well was only 175 feet deep, so they decided to put in some new casings and the valve on the bottom. We took a 1½ ton truck with a winch and ran the cables over the pulley on the windmill tower and down to pull the rods and casings. With everything replaced, the output did not increase much. A well driller was brought in and drove a well down over 400 feet, but the water was still alkaline. One of the well drillers said that the water came through a layer of gypsum that made it alkaline. To shower, we had to use salt water soap. Regular soap did not make suds at all and if you washed your hair with it, the soap congealed like grease and was hard to remove.

This area was part of the Jornado del Muerto. There were quite a few abandoned ranch houses throughout the area, most were leased to the McDonald Cattle Company. We shut the windmills off to try to keep the cattle from coming in for water, but it was a hopeless task.

There was a ridge of alkali that intersected both the East-West Road and the North-South Road. When a vehicle crossed it, a cloud of white dust billowed up like talcum powder. The men riding in the vehicles, to and from the guard posts were completely covered with it. It also got into your eyes, ears and mouth. It was really miserable trying to get it off with the alkaline water in the showers.

We had to keep an eye out for the rattlesakes, scorpions and tarantulas. Those big, black tarantulas were about six inches across and two or three inches in height and very furry. In the latrine we had to watch for scorpions. They seemed to like it in there, for it was at ground level.

We tried to bring the men in from the guardposts for their meals, but the distances were just too great. After we got generators out to the posts, most men started cooking bacon and eggs on hot plates. There was also a lot of peanut butter, peach and pineapple preserves and orange marmalade eaten. I still love orange marmalade.

We had a lot of vehicle breakdowns, for those roads were a real torture test for them. The few of us there were alone until the Engineer Outfit came a month or so later. They were the heavy equipment operators (to take care of the roads), mechanics and a complete mess hall crew. That meant we did not have to

cook anymore. I do not remember when the main body of MP's came down, but it must have been about the same time as the Engineers. Until then, we had been spread pretty thin, mostly on road blocks and jeep patrols.

Sometime early that spring they brought in Jumbo on its special trailer from the railroad siding at Pope, west of the Base. The big tower was built and then never used after all. The tower was blown over but Jumbo never moved during the test. They tried to destroy it, but were not successful. Its remains are by Zero Point at Trinity.

Those early days were very hectic, getting the roads in halfway decent shape, stringing the miles of instrument wire across the desert and getting the camera bunkers set up. They had the one hundred ton test in May which completely obliterated the wooden platform it was on. It was not quite what I expected for that much explosive.

About this time, our group was pretty much isolated for weeks at a time. The Engineers had taken over the truck driving and they were doing most of the hauling from the Hill. Our clothes got pretty decrepit since it took quite a few weeks to get up to the Hill to trade them in at the storeroom. This was about the time that the fellow was trimming our hair with the the horse clippers when we got shaggy.

One evening We had a little excitement when the planes flew over and bombed our camp with practice bombs. Of course the bombs were not powerful, but they could have caused some damage if they had hit a building or the motor pool.

We finally got a Post Office box in Socorro, P.O. Box 632, then it did not take as long to get our mail. Our clothes were also taken to a laundry in Socorro. We picked up our beer and soda at the Illinois Distributing Company at the old Hammel Brewery building. This building has since been donated to the city and is being used as a museum. We got to be good friends with Clarence and Marcella Hammel who ran the business.

Things really got hectic after the one hundred ton test in May up to the actual countdown in July. We almost had to have traffic directors on the crossroads. Road blocks were set up on the roads going into the Zero area to make sure that everyone going in was authorized to enter. That did not help the tempers much, but we could not let anyone that did not belong in the area interfere with the work going on.

Most of the people were too keyed up to relax when they did come into camp at night. We had a movie screen outside that showed movies a couple times a week. If the weather was bad

they were shown in our makeshift rec hall. Inside was a pool table and a couple of card tables and access to beer and soda. One of the biggest attractions was the roughhouse volleyball games. We had the net strung between our barracks and the latrine building. There was quite an audience at times, with all of the scientists there. One hand grenade would have wiped out the entire A-Bomb Project.

We had several pets. Lt. Bush had a little wire-haired terrier that was the favorite of everyone. There also was a white sheep dog that came into one of the posts from a nearby ranch. He soon adopted us and he had to ride with one of the guard sergeants on their tour of duty all of the time. I ended up with a young collie dog that one of the guys had gotten from one of the ranches west of us. I shipped him home in January of 1946. Rex was a beautiful and intelligent dog and I had him about fourteen years. One of the engineers also had a pet crow and I raised a young hawk that I had taken out of a nest in a yucca plant. It got to be a very large bird. I finally had to let it go but it stayed around base camp because I fed it meat scraps from the mess hall. On my first visit back to Trinity site in 1987, I met a fellow that had been there in 1945 and had a picture of me with the hawk on my arm.

I was amazed at the amount of wildlife on the range, from the hundreds of antelopes down to the little desert tortoises that came out after a rain. There were a lot of big mule deer in the brushy ridges, quail, road runners, hawks, eagles, porcupines and coyotes. We also had a prairie dog town just north of Base Camp.

We got a pump going and filled one of the reservoirs at the McDonald ranch and used it as a swimming pool. The only trouble was that the alkali in the water dried in white spots on your body and made you itch all over. The reservoirs still look the same today and there is an old motor sitting there that I believe is the same one we used to pump the water.

The McDonald ranch house has been restored now as a museum now. They have a glass case in it with a picture of me with some of the horses, my old film badge and the welders glass that I watched the Test through on July 16, 1945. They had issued us those arc welders glasses and we had taped them to a piece of cardboard to view the Test. I was one of the few who actually saw the blast. Most others were in slit trenches or behind the embankment, north of Base Camp with their faces down, away from the blast. My job was to take a technician from Base Camp to the northern boundary of the range. We were checking for radioactivity along the main road to make sure that it was not settling back to the west.

Most of us did not know what the A-bomb was, but we were told that it would be big and that it would shorten the war, saving a lot of lives. I do not think anyone slept that night of the 15th and early the 16th. Most of us with an assigned job laid down with our clothes on, but sleep consisted mostly of napping and jumping awake. After a few hours, most of us just got up and stood around in the Mess Hall for coffee.

The clouds were moving across the sky with intermittent showers and flashes of lightening. The tension was increasing by the minute. I had my vehicle all ready and I joined the technician with the Geiger counter at the vehicle at zero minus fifteen minutes. We had the face shields of cardboard with the arc welder's glasses taped into them in order to watch the explosion. He told me not to look directly at it, but to look at an oblique angle to the blast. Even with the welder's glass, I could not keep my eyes open, the light was so brilliant. The air blast came with quite a bit of force, but at the distance we were, I do not think it would have caused any damage. We could feel the heat, but it was not too intense. After the first intense bright light, it seemed to have shades of purple, blue and gray. Then the cloud started rising out of the seething mass.

After the designated waiting period, we went from our post, along the main road, to the northern boundary. Every mile or two we checked for radiation with the Geiger counter. I do not think there were any elevations of radiation going north, but coming back south it had raised a little as we neared B Point (10,000 S).

The next day was quiet with everyone talking about the blast and wondering when it would be safe to go into the area. The lead-lined tanks had gone in and gotten earth samples. I do not remember how long it was before we went into the area, but it was not long before we had the mounted post around the crater. They had issued us film badges that we wore at all times. The badges had to be worn at all times and were renewed after so many days. Medical technicians checked our blood every couple of weeks.

Some of the men went back to Los Alamos and things settled down to a humdrum existence after Hiroshima and Nagasaki. There were a few more curiosity seekers that we turned back at the road blocks. We spent a lot of time, by now, listening to the Armed Forces Radio to find out how many points it took to be discharged. Captain Bush arranged for us to have a long furlough in September and October. Half went one time and when they returned the other half went. They had arranged to have a train car reserved for the group that was hooked on to the train in Belen for the people going north and east.

About this time in the fall was when most of the hunting took place. As far as the statement that we obliterated a herd of antelope, that is a complete exaggeration. I think the herds drifted away from the area of activity. You could get up on a truck in the motor pool with binoculars and see hundreds of antelopes on the slopes of the mountain east of Base Camp. As far as I know, the only one killed with a sub-machine gun was the very first one killed in early 1945. That was with the gun on single fire, not on automatic. This I know because I helped to dress the animal. Some of the engineers had their own hunting rifles, but we used the .30 caliber carbines.

The mule deer were really big and were on the menu regularly. The venison was far better than the antelope which was mostly made into stew. I would not admit to Old Man McDonald's claim that we killed all of his cattle, but I do have trouble with eating a "Big Mac" now.

We had a really big party at Christmas time, in 1945. A bus load of WAC's came down from Los Alamos and everyone really celebrated. That winter it did get cold with a lot of blowing snow, so the parkas and heavy winter gear came in handy. We thought they were off their rockers when they issued the parkas, as well as mukluks and heavy mittens, but we used them.

A few of the older men got their points along about this time and were discharged. My turn came in February of 1946 with a quite a few of the fellows that had come into the Army in late 1942. They took us up to Los Alamos to turn in our clothes and equipment and then down to Ft. Bliss, at El Paso, for our discharge.

I got home to Illinois about the 21st of February. I went to work at the Keystone Steel and Wire Company on March 13th and worked there a little over 36 years. I retired on May 1, 1982.

I still write to a few of the fellows that were at Los Alamos and Trinity. Recently I received a letter from Col. Bush, who lives in Colorado Springs. It was written by his wife for he is an invalid in a wheelchair. I do not know if he could furnish you with any of the details of our life in the desert or not. I do not think they could have picked a better CO for our outfit. He was colorful and flamboyant but all business when he had to be. He tried to get everything he could for his men.

As I reread this I can think of a lot of other things that we did and things that happened, but if I try to get them all down, I will be rewriting for a year. I have tried to hit the highlights, so if you have any questions, please let me know. Always glad to help. I wish I were closer, so I could talk to you and answer questions.