



News Nob

Introduction

The earliest media reports of atmospheric nuclear testing in Nevada were based on eyewitness accounts. News reporters considered it a sign of importance when invited to watch detonations from News Nob, a large pile of volcanic tuff situated on the edge of Yucca Lake at the Nevada Test Site, now known at the Nevada National Security Site (NNSS). Thousands of newsmen trekked to observe and write about atomic mushroom clouds billowing above the desert of Nevada in the 1950s. Their articles were eagerly read by Americans following the nuclear arms role in stemming Cold War aggression.

News Nob had a simple beginning. It received its name when a former Nevada Test Site construction worker who took a weather beaten board with a yellow door knob attached to it from an old outdoor lavatory and painted "This is News Nob" across the door in yellow. The original board is gone, but a replacement board still manages to hang onto to the side of the rock pile, despite years of wind and rain that tried to pry it loose from its precarious perch.



Journalists set up on News Nob to witness an atmospheric test in March 1953.

First American Press Witness Live Test in 1952

It was from this point on April 22, 1952, that the American press first reported, and the American public first viewed via television, the nuclear device known as 'Big Shot' by the press, but officially named Charlie by the Atomic Energy Commission.

About 200 news reporters converged at News Nob to view the 31-kiloton device detonate above Yucca Flat. Among them were: Walter Cronkite, Lowell Thomas, Robert Considine, Thomas Henry, Jack Griffin, and local Las Vegas reporters Hank Greenspun, James Hart, Dennis Schieck, and Moritz Zenoff.

This account was reported in the Department of State Washington Bulletin by John Kerigan, a.k.a. Wes Pedersen.

way it feels when you are an American newsman, one of 200 assigned to report the test explosion here of the atom bomb, 1952 version.

"You are waiting at News Nob, the rocky hill some ten miles from the spot on the dry salt bed of Yucca Flat where the bomb will be dropped soon. A pair of specially designed sun goggles is in your hand. You are waiting for the signal to put them on; to see the first atomic explosion ever made public in the continental United States.

"As you wait, you wonder. What can you say that will be different from the stories of the other newspaper reporters, the television broadcasters, and radio commentators? After all, the explosion of an atomic bomb is not a novelty in itself. This will be the 27th American bomb exploded, including the two that were dropped on Japan, and the test shots in the Pacific.



"Then, as you look at the other newsmen around you, it strikes you that they, and you, are the story -- that you are present at an event that only a country intent on keeping the peace could permit you to report.

"Now you grow tense. You have been given the 'get ready' signal. Miles away, you see approaching the airplane that will drop the bomb that will release more energy than the ones exploded during the war.

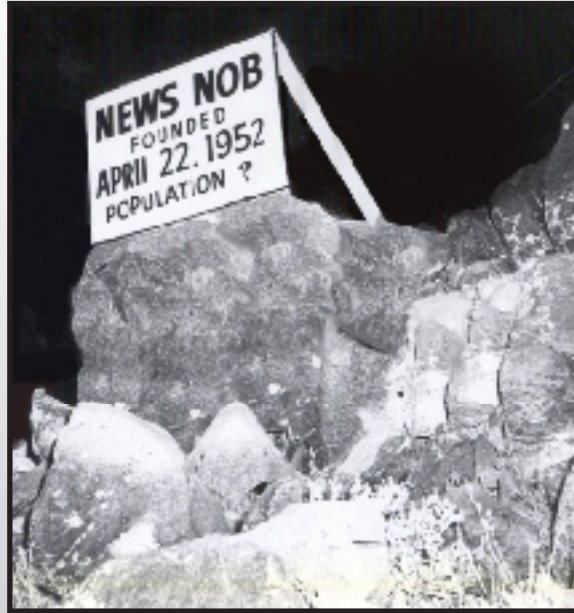
"You put on the dark goggles, turn your head, and wait for the signal.

"Now - the bomb has been dropped. You wait the prescribed time, then turn your head and look. A fantastically bright cloud is climbing upward like a huge umbrella.

"The rest is anti-climax. You brace yourself against the shock wave that follows an atomic explosion. A heat wave comes first, then the shock, strong enough to knock an unprepared man down. Then, after what seems like hours, the man-made sunburst fades away. In the desert flat before you, scientists wait to test the effects of the explosion. Soldiers from privates to generals, wait to advance into the field in a tactical maneuver. Aircraft circle overhead, waiting to drop parachutists into the area.

"But you do not wait to watch the troop exercise phase. You have a story, and you want to start writing it -- your story of how you were invited to watch an atomic explosion -- not as a personnel privilege, but for the purpose of sharing the experience with your fellow Americans, and with people everywhere else in the world who can be reached by the free press."

As Kerigan began to write his story at News Nob, bartenders on the Las Vegas Strip celebrated the detonation by serving up "atomic cocktails," a concoction of vodka, brandy, and champagne laced with a dash of sherry, a popular drink often served after a nuclear detonation. At the Desert Inn's Sky Room Lounge, pianist Ted Mossman played his "Atomic Bomb Bounce," a boogie-woogie tune popular with the tourists and others who had become fascinated with the new weapons technology made public by reporters who witnessed it all on News Nob.



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