



Military History



NASA established White Sands Test Facility, a space shuttle runway, located north of the monument on White Sands Missile Range in 1963. (Nasa Photo)

In response to the bombing of Pearl Harbor in 1941, the U.S. military established a permanent presence in the Tularosa Basin during World War II creating the Alamogordo Bombing and Gunnery Range and White Sands Proving Grounds. (NPS Photo)

Beginning in the 1540s with the first Spanish exploration into New Mexico's interior, there has been a military presence in what we know today as the "Land of Enchantment." However, the Tularosa Basin, labeled the "Land without Water," was almost completely ignored by European settlers until the nineteenth century. It lacked a permanent water resource, and traveling parties preferred to brave the Jornada del Muerto, on the western slopes of the San Andres and Organ Mountains, rather than enter the Tularosa Basin. It was also the home of local Apaches, whose fierce martial presence often deterred anyone from trying to settle in the basin. When European settlers did enter the basin, it was typically a military retaliation against Apache raiding parties.

After the United States' successful

engagement in the Mexican-American War, the U.S. Army established military posts, often on the sites of previously occupied Spanish presidios (fortresses) in the area. During the Civil War, these military forts and the soldiers dispatched from them helped with the defense against invading confederate forces from Texas. After the Civil War, the United States looked to expand westward, and the U.S. Army again became responsible for those moving into the western frontier.

During this period, several Army forts in New Mexico were manned with Buffalo Soldiers. These African American soldiers were responsible for protecting the frontier from lawlessness and American Indian incursions. Not far from White Sands National Monument, in Hembrillo Canyon, the 9th Calvary under Colonel

Hatch fought an offensive battle against Victorio's, which may have been one of the largest battles of the Victorio campaign carried out by the U.S. Calvary.

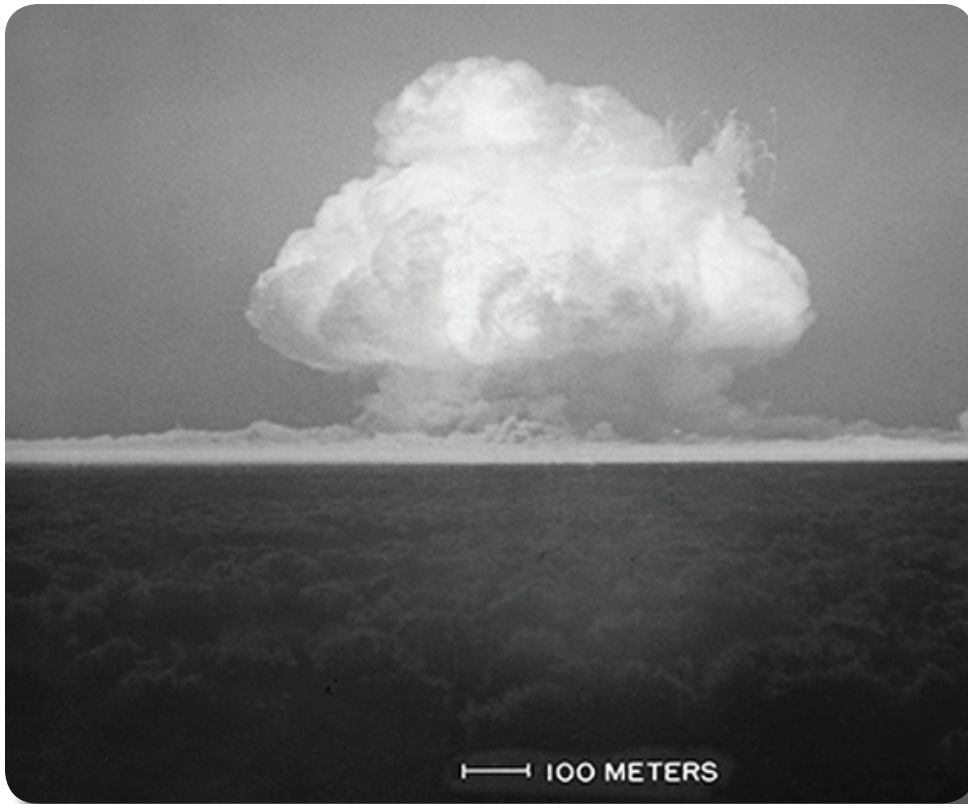
In response to the bombing of Pearl Harbor in 1941, the U.S. military established a permanent presence in the Tularosa Basin during World War II creating the Alamogordo Bombing and Gunnery Range, known today as Holloman Air Force Base, and White Sands Proving Grounds, now White Sands Missile Range. It was at White Sands Missile Range that some of the German scientists, including Werner Von Braun, who were instrumental in the conception and development of the V-2 rocket, relocated after World War II.

At the end of World War II, a new conflict, known as the Cold War, arose and encompassed nearly

half of the twentieth century. Throughout the Cold War, the United States and the Soviet Union, engaged in an arms race of military defense. Development of the atomic bomb and guided, missile defense systems during and after WWII was spurred by the need for military readiness against surprise military attacks. The Soviet Union and the United States both sought to maintain parity, or achieve supremacy, by advancing their military technology. The

military installations of White Sands Missile Range, Holloman Air Force Base, and Fort Bliss were actively engaged in military defense readiness and development throughout the Cold War. Evidence of the Cold War period can be found at the monument. A double Askania cinetheodolite structure, now known as Northeast 30, was constructed in the joint use area shared by White Sands National Monument and White Sands Missile Range in 1953. Since the

beginning, the operations of the monument's military neighbors have been at the forefront of cutting-edge technology and experimentation. Visitors to the monument can experience a piece of this military history as the flight paths of fighter jets during mission training pass over the dunefield.



On July 16, 1945 the world's first atomic bomb was detonated in the north-central portion of the missile range, approximately 60 miles north of White Sands National Monument.



Rock test at White Sands Missile Range.