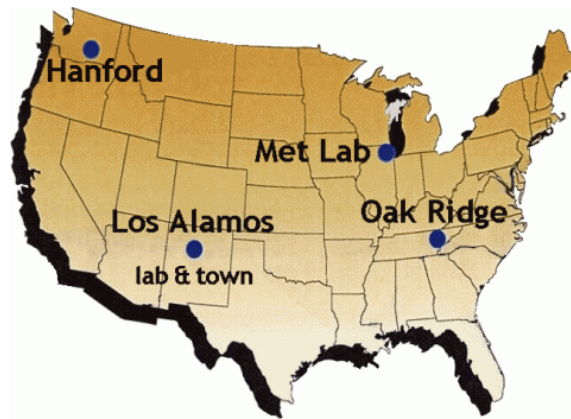




What was the Manhattan Project?

The "Manhattan Project" was the codename given to the U.S. government's nuclear-bomb-development program during World War II. The operation was huge and employed so many people—during its height—that it resembled the size of America's automotive industry.

The whole process got its start when [Albert Einstein wrote a letter](#) to President Franklin Roosevelt, in 1939, warning that Germany and its highly educated scientists could be developing a weapon of mass destruction based on atomic energy.

Initially paying little attention to the warning, from the famous scientist, President Roosevelt began to think about what Einstein had said. He ordered that a project be undertaken, to look into the possibilities.

The military person placed in charge of what became "The Manhattan Project" was Leslie Groves. He held the rank of Lieutenant General with the United States Army Corps of Engineers.

Groves was a hard-driving, "get it done" kind of guy. One of his subordinates, Colonel Kenneth D. Nichols, used these words to describe his boss:

First, General Groves is the biggest S.O.B. I have ever worked for. He is most demanding. He is most critical. He is always a driver, never a praiser. He is abrasive and sarcastic. He disregards all normal organizational channels.

He is extremely intelligent. He has the guts to make timely, difficult decisions. He is the most egotistical man I know. He knows he is right and so sticks by his decision.

He abounds with energy and expects everyone to work as hard, or even harder, than he does... if I had to do my part of the atomic bomb project over again and had the privilege of picking my boss, I would pick General Groves. (See the [biography of Leslie Groves](#) at Atomic Heritage.)

Groves gave an oral history about his years as head of the Manhattan Project. We can [listen to it](#) via Manhattan Project voices. We can also watch a [two-part documentary](#) about him.

[Dr. Robert Oppenheimer](#) was General Groves' civilian counterpart at the Manhattan Project. A brilliant scientist, Oppenheimer later came to regret his role in developing the nuclear bomb.

Today, the U.S. Department of Energy is the successor of the Manhattan Project. Its officials tell us more about the [Manhattan Project's history](#) (and the people who made the world's first nuclear bombs):

The Manhattan Project is the story of some of the most renowned scientists of the century combining with industry, the military, and tens of thousands of ordinary Americans working at sites across the country to translate original scientific discoveries into an entirely new kind of weapon.

When the existence of this nationwide, secret project was revealed to the American people following the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, most were astounded to learn that such a far-flung, government-run, top-secret operation existed, with physical properties, payroll, and a labor force comparable to the automotive industry.

At its peak, the project employed 130,000 workers and, by the end of the war, had spent \$2.2 billion.

The legacy of the Manhattan Project is immense. The advent of nuclear weapons not only helped bring an end to the Second World War but ushered in the atomic age and determined how the next war, the Cold War, would be fought.

In addition, the Manhattan Project became the organizational model behind the remarkable achievements of American "big science" during the the second half of the twentieth century.

Without the Manhattan Project, the Department of Energy, with its national laboratories - the jewels in the crown of the nation's science establishment, would not exist as it does in its present form.

In this image, from the U.S. Department of Energy, we see the locations where the U.S. federal government had Manhattan-Project locations.

Credits:

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See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/Manhattan-Project>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/Manhattan-Project>

Media Stream



Leslie Groves - Manhattan Project, Part 1

Video online, courtesy The Atomic Heritage Foundation.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Leslie-Groves-Manhattan-Project-Part-1>