BACKGROUND

When Truman became president on April 12, 1945, upon the death of President Roosevelt, he had no knowledge of the actual bomb project itself and his first information about what was really being done came from Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson on April 25th.

Stimson himself was virtual head of the project and had been during the years of its development as a military weapon. Stimson had conferred frequently with President Roosevelt during this period but his last meeting with FDA had been on March 15th. (See Stimson biography, "On Active Service." (Pg. 615)). At that time he discussed a memorandum FDA had sent him from an unnamed "distinguished public servant who was fearful lest the Manhattan (atomic) project 'be a lemon'; it was an opinion common among those not fully informed. ..... The writer, alarmed at rumors of extravagance in the project, suggested they get a body of outside scientists to pass on the project "because rumors are going around that Vannevar Bush and Jim Conant have sold the President a lemon on the subject and ought to be checked up." Stimson characterized it as a "literary and nervous memorandum and rather silly" and he gave the President a list of scientists actually engaged in it.
Truman's first connection with the bomb project — though he knew nothing of what the project was — occurred long before he became President. It was during his Senate service as a member of the Appropriations Committee and as chairman of the Senate Special Committee to Investigate the National Defense Program — known as the "Truman Committee" — when the first appropriation for the project was made before the Appropriations Committee. In talks with the President on at least two occasions (May 4, 1941, and August 6, 1941) he told me of this. He said the appropriation request did not disclose the nature of the project and, as a result, he ordered an investigator for his special committee to look into it. In his memoirs, Truman says that he sent investigators into Tennessee (Oak Ridge) and to the state of Washington (Hanford) to find out what the massive constructions were and their purpose. Immediately afterward, Secretary Stimson called him and they got together. Stimson did not tell him what the project was but did tell him it concerned the topmost secret in the government and that they wanted to go ahead without disclosing any information. On Stimson's assurances, the President called off his investigation and did not go further into the matter (FSA talk, Aug. 6, 1941).

He told me (May 5, 1945) that he knew nothing about the bomb project itself until Stimson went into it with him on April 25, 1945, after he had become president.

On April 12, 1945, after the Cabinet met, soon after he was sworn in at 7:09 p.m., Truman says in his memoirs, that Stimson remained and said he wanted Truman "to know about an immense project that was under way — a project looking to the development of a new explosive of almost unbelievable destructive power." He says this left his passing but that "it was the first
April 13, 1945.

President Truman's appointments were:

10:15 - Secretary of State Stettinius.

Admiral King.
Secretary of War Stimson.
Secretary of Navy Forrestal.
General Bliss.
12:30 - To the Capitol for lunch.
2:30 - James F. Byrnes.

The President told me (August 6, 1951) in a long conversation, much of it about the atomic bomb, that it was, he thought, on April 13 that Byrnes, who had been Director of War Mobilization under Roosevelt but had resigned April 2, 1945 and was succeeded by Fred W. Vinson, who had succeeded Byrnes as Head of the Office of Economic Stabilization, had told him for the first time something about the project. Vinson's name does not appear on the President's appointment list for that day. (Check this).

Byrnes had known of the atomic bomb project for some time but in his book 'Speaking Frankly' (Page 297) he said he did not remember just when Roosevelt told him about it. He believes it was the summer of 1943.
April 19, 1945.

President Truman's appointments were:

20:15 - Secretary of State Stettinius.
A. King.

Admiral Leahy.
Secretary of War Stimson.
Secretary of Navy Forrestal.
General Bissell.

19:30 - To the Capitol for lunch.
21:30 - James F. Byrnes.

The President told me (August 6, 1945) in a long conversation, much of it about the atomic bomb, that it was, he thought, on April 19 that Byrnes, who had been Director of War Utilization under Roosevelt, had resigned April 19, 1945 and was succeeded by Fred U. Vinson, who had succeeded Byrnes as head of the Office of Economic Stabilization, and Vinson told him for the first time something about the project and its purposes. Vinson's name does not appear on the President's appointment list for that day. (Check this.)

Byrnes had known of the atomic bomb project for some time but in his book "Speaking Frankly" (Page 257) he said he did not remember just when Roosevelt told him about it. He believes it was the summer of 1943.
Apr. 10, 1945: After Cabinet met, SHT says
Sitoson remained and told him he wanted Truman
to know about an immense project that was
under way—a project looking to the development
of a new explosive of almost unbelievable
destructive power.” SHT says it left him
puzzled, that “It was the first bit of informa-
tion that had come to me about the atomic bomb
but he gave me no details.” He says it was not
until the next day that he was told enough to
give him some understanding of the developmen
t under way.

Tell also how “many months before, as part
of the work of the Council to Investigate the
National Defense Program, of which he was chairman
he sent investigators into Tennessee and to
the state of Washington to find out what certain
enormous constructions were and what their
purpose was. Stimson then came to see him and
said he could not tell Truman what it was, but
it was the greatest project in history of the
world and was most top secret. As a result
Truman says he called off his investigators.

The next day, Truman writes, James F. Byrnes
came to see him and told him a few details—that
they were perfecting an explosive great enough
to destroy the whole world. (Check Byrnes version

He says Leahy was with him at the time and
that Leahy predicted the bomb never would go off.
Truman also says it was later when
Vannevar Bush, head of the Office of Scientific
Research and Development came to the White
House, that he was given a scientific version of
the atomic bomb.” (Check appointments and date
when Bush came to White House) (also check Leahy’s
book and version.)