

August 6, 1951

On Saturday, August 4th, I saw the President at his office about 10:40 AM and he told me about his first knowledge and connection with the atomic bomb development.

He said that his first connection with it was when he was serving in the Senate as a Member of the Appropriations Committee and the first appropriation request for the atomic project came before the Committee. The appropriation request did not disclose the nature of the project and shortly afterward the President, in his investigation of the war effort, ordered an investigator to go down to Oak Ridge.(?) Immediately afterward he said Secretary of War Stimson called him and said he wanted to come over and see the President. The President said he offered to go over to Stimson's office and they got together. Stimson did not tell the President what the project was but did tell him that it concerned the most top secret in the Government and they wanted to go ahead without disclosing any information. On Stimson's assurances, the President called off his investigator and did not go further into the matter.

Immediately after he became President -- the President recalls that it was, he thought, the day after he was sworn in, James F. Byrnes, who had been Director of War Mobilization and Fred M. Vinson, who was to succeed him, came to see him and told him for the first time about the project and its purpose. On April 1945, Stimson had an appointment with the President and at that time he told Mr. Truman all about the project. Stimson later described this in his book, "On Active Service in Peace and War".

The President said that on July 16th, while he was at Potsdam for the conference with Churchill and Stalin, the message was received that the first test of the bomb had been made at Alamogordo, New Mexico, and had been successful. He said it was an almost "ecstatic" message and told how the explosion of the bomb had made a hole in the earth 1200 feet in diameter, had melted the steel tower from which the bomb was dropped and fused the sand on the desert floor about the scene.

"Then," the President said Stimson and I began to discuss the use of the bomb. It was my suggestion that we pick out a place to drop it as near a war plant as possible so as not to injure any more people than necessary. He said he conferred not only with Stimson but with Byrnes and Admiral Leahy and the decision was reached to drop the bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The President said that the military leaders believed, up to that time, that it would require an army of at least a million Americans to defeat Japan and they told the President, in answer to his inquiries that they estimated there would be about 25% casualties. He said he asked what the population of Hiroshima was and his recollection was that they said about 60,000. He said that he felt and said it was far better to kill 60,000 Japanese than to have 250,000 Americans killed and he, therefore, ordered the dropping of the bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.