

# Albuquerque's Unique Museum

---

## When AWCI Holds Its 65th Convention in New Mexico, Here's a Museum You Shouldn't Miss

---

Nowhere else does such a museum exist.

One-word descriptions of it run the spectrum from "depressing," "terrifying," "ghoulish" and "disturbing" to "enlightening," "educational," and "unforgettable."

The museum which earns such deeply emotional reactions is the National Atomic Museum—located at Kirkland Air Force Base near Albuquerque, N.M.

On exhibit there replicas of 55 nuclear bombs, beginning with Little Boy and Fat Man, the bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki 36 years ago. Included, too, are recent thermonuclear weapons . . . just the cases, now, not the inner workings of the bombs.

Those attending the annual convention of the Association of Wall and Ceiling Industries—International in Albuquerque, N.M. on March 29-April 3 will be able to see this incredible museum which is open seven days a week.

Rick Ray, museum historian and one of a dozen staff members, describes a couple of side-by-side atomic bombs in this matter-of-fact way:

"This is the 21-ton, 30-foot long Mark 17 hydrogen bomb. It's called a 'city buster' because it is designed to destroy entire cities. It's the biggest bomb we have in the museum."

"Next to it our smallest atomic weapon, the two-foot-long Davy Drockett, capable of being launched from a jeep, with one-tenth the yield of Little Boy."

A few feet away, a nuclear bomb is held upright by a small parachute. "The parachute slows it down as it falls so the plane can get out of the area before it goes boom," Ray explains.

It should come as no surprise that the museum is especially popular with visitors from the Soviet Union and other communist nations. They photograph everything in sight.

Says Ray, "Nothing in the museum is restricted or classified. The insides of the bombs are secret, but the insides are not on display."

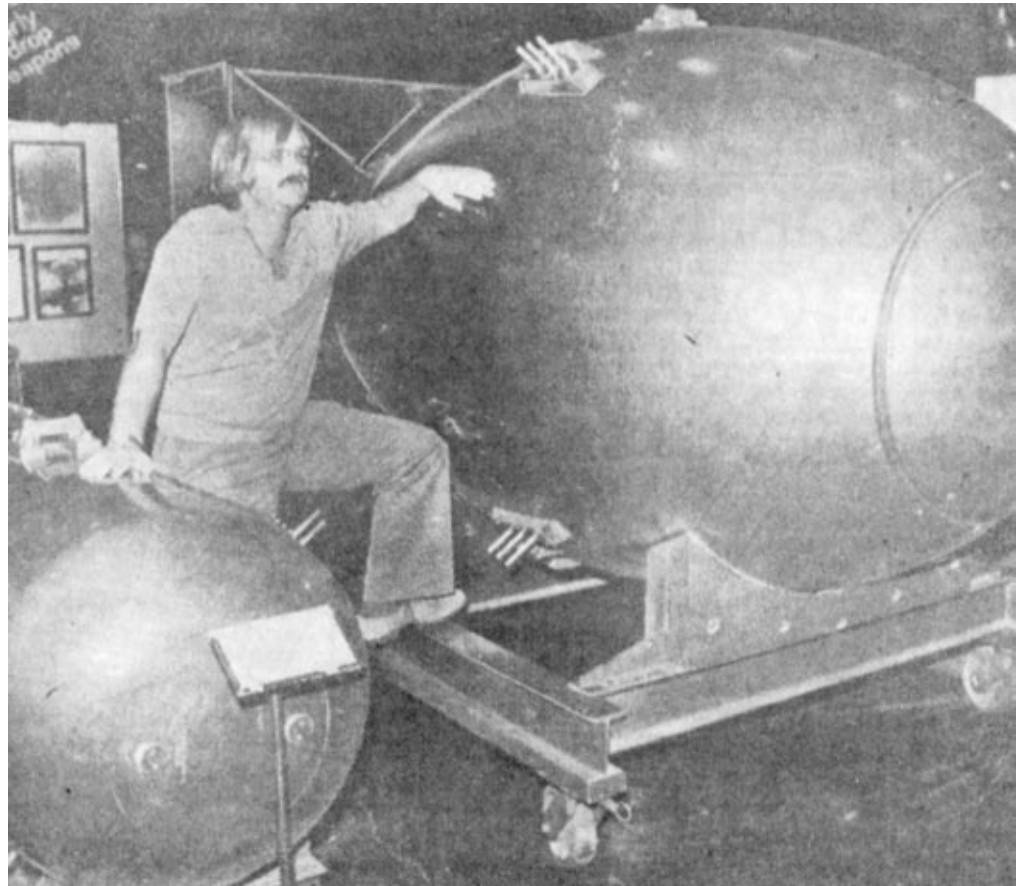
In a 1969 decision by the Defense Department, the cradle of America's nuclear weaponry, Albuquerque, was chosen to be the site for a museum to preserve and present the

history of mankind's most sophisticated vehicles of destruction.

At first, it was operated by the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission, but now the Department of Energy runs it. There are no admission fees.

"This isn't a prideful display of American's military might," Ray said. "This is merely a hint of our strength. There are hundreds of different kinds of nuclear bombs in our arsenal. Most of what you see here is obsolete.

"The government isn't trying to



Rick Ray, historian of the National Atomic Museum at Albuquerque, NM, shows visitors replicas of Little Boy and Fat Man, on right. The bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

---

**“These things that you will see here are a great  
mystery to people . . . yet they have shaped  
everything that has happened in the world since 1945.”**

---

propagandize or trying to make the public like these weapons. It's a matter of teaching history. These things you see here are a great mystery to people. They have shaped everything that has happened in the world since 1945.”

The staff people even admit to experiencing some hairy situations, so strong is the emotional reaction by some visitors. “A lot of times they get us confused with the weapons.”

“People are usually affected by all of this. Many want to sit and argue. They blame us for the bombs. We just work here.”

The reasons for becoming upset are varied. Some feel the government is giving away secrets . . . so complete is the museum. They feel Third World nations and others will photograph the cases, return home and

make their own bombs.

Others feels it is unseemly to publicize an instrument of such comprehensive destructive potential. And there are those who look at the bombs on display with the same fascination that moths are attracted to light or flame—horrible but fascinating.

The museum has one of the best collections of books, pamphlets, documents and other information available anywhere on nuclear weapons. All the material is unclassified and available to anyone. Many authors and researchers in this country and from abroad use the library.

“Of course, these weapons are instruments of death. But at the same time, maybe, just maybe, by seeing these terrible weapons it might make everyone more convinced than ever

of the necessity for world leaders to talk, to negotiate, to do everything possible to prevent them from ever being used again.”

The evolution of nuclear weapons from the early 1940s to the present is represented here from the German A-bomb project, the first reactor in 1942 at the University of Chicago, as well as displays from Oak Ridge, Hanford, Los Alamos, and the New Mexico desert site where the first atomic bomb was exploded as a test.

In a display of safety precautions in handling the bombs is a photo story of the B-52 and KC-135 air tanker that collided and crashed over Spain in 1966. The B-52 was carrying five hydrogen bombs. One of the damaged bombs recovered from the crash is on exhibit.