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**Correspondence (“Top Secret”)  
of the Manhattan Engineer  
District, 1942-1946**



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*Records of the Office of the Chief of Engineers*

*Record Group 77*

CORRESPONDENCE ("TOP SECRET") OF THE  
MANHATTAN ENGINEER DISTRICT  
1942-1946

On the five rolls of this microfilm publication is reproduced a series of formerly security classified "Top Secret" correspondence maintained by Maj. Gen. Leslie R. Groves when commanding general of the Manhattan Engineer District from September 1942 to December 1946. The documents were placed in the series either because of their special interest to Groves or their high security classification. The correspondence, much of which is with high-level U.S. Government or military officials, documents the Army's role in the development, production, and deployment of atomic weapons, and is mostly dated 1942-46, with occasional items as late as 1950. The records are a part of those of the Manhattan Engineer District, contained in Records of the Office of the Chief of Engineers, Record Group (RG) 77.

Administrative History

U.S. Government involvement in the nuclear energy field dates from 1939. Experiments conducted in Germany during the previous year had resulted in the discovery of nuclear fission, and subsequent work in the United States and France demonstrated the feasibility of uranium chain reactions, releasing massive amounts of power. Prompted by nuclear scientist Leo Szilard, economist Alexander Sachs, of the Lehman Corporation, made a personal call on President Franklin D. Roosevelt in October 1939 to urge Government support of nuclear research. Sachs carried with him a letter from Albert Einstein that summarized recent developments in the nuclear field, indicated the possibility of constructing powerful atomic bombs, and warned of possible German interest in uranium.

Shortly after the meeting with Sachs, President Roosevelt appointed an Advisory Committee on Uranium. With the establishment of the National Defense Research Committee (NDRC) in June 1940, Roosevelt gave instructions that the Uranium Committee was to become an NDRC subcommittee reporting to the NDRC Chairman, Dr. Vannevar Bush. In the summer of 1941, the Uranium Committee was enlarged and redesignated the Uranium, or S-1, Section of NDRC.

Roosevelt's Executive Order 8807, dated June 28, 1941, established the Office of Scientific Research and Development (OSRD) to mobilize the nation's scientific resources for national defense. Bush became director of OSRD and was replaced by

Dr. James B. Conant as head of NDRC. After December 1941, the uranium program was administered by OSRD directly, first through an OSRD S-1 Section, and then, beginning June 1942, through an OSRD Executive Committee headed by Conant. Under OSRD auspices, an intensive research program in nuclear fission was soon underway.

In December 1941, Roosevelt designated Vice President Henry A. Wallace, Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson, and Army Chief of Staff Gen. George C. Marshall, along with Conant, and Bush, as a Top Policy Group to determine procedures for the uranium project. At a meeting on December 16, 1941, the group recommended expediting research and planning, with an emphasis on constructing pilot plants for producing fissionable materials. Bush advocated that the Army take over direction of the project once full scale construction of the plants was underway, and further recommended that a technically trained Army officer be put in charge. Subsequently, General Marshall appointed Brig. Gen. Wilhelm D. Styer as the Army's principal S-1 contact, after which Styer assigned Col. James C. Marshall as the S-1 Engineering Officer.

Colonel Marshall initially referred to his new command as the DSM (Development of Substitute Materials) Project, but on June 18, the Chief of Engineers, Maj. Gen. Eugene Reybold, instructed him to form a new Engineer district to manage the project. The district was designated the Manhattan Engineer District by General Order 33 of the War Department, Office of the Army Chief of Staff, dated August 13, 1942. On September 17, 1942, General Styer's superior, Lt. Gen. Brehon Somervell, appointed then Col. Leslie R. Groves of the Corps of Engineers to take complete executive charge of the Manhattan Engineer District Project.

On September 23, 1942, the Top Policy Group appointed a Military Policy Committee "to consider and plan military policy relating to the project, such planning to cover production, strategic and tactical problems and research and development relating thereto." Bush was appointed chairman (with Conant as alternate), with Adm. W. R. E. Purnell and General Styer as the other members. Groves, by then brigadier general, was to "sit with the Committee and act as Executive Officer to carry out the policies that may be determined." Periodically, the Committee was to submit progress reports to the President's Policy Group. By late 1942, OSRD began to assume an ancillary role in the atomic bomb project, but not until May 1943 did the Army assume complete responsibility under the Military Policy Committee. The OSRD S-1 Executive Committee, though not formally dissolved, became inactive at that time. General Groves, as commanding general of the Manhattan Engineer District, reported to the Secretary of War, the Chief of Staff, and the Military Policy Committee.

The Manhattan Engineer District (also known as the Manhattan Project) was initially headquartered in New York City. It had no prescribed territorial limits and functioned as a special District for directing the atomic bomb project. As such, the Manhattan Engineer District supervised research, development and testing projects, plant construction, and production programs relating to the project. The District also administered numerous laboratories and field installations, including the Clinton Engineer Works at Oak Ridge, Tenn., which performed separation of uranium isotopes; the Hanford Engineer Works at Richland, Wash., which produced plutonium; and the laboratory at Los Alamos, N. Mex., which performed final processing of the fissionable materials and assembled the finished atomic bombs. The District also maintained facilities in more than 30 cities and, during its peak operations, employed more than 129,000 persons. By the end of 1945, overall cost of the Manhattan Project had reached nearly \$2 billion. On July 16, 1945, the first atomic bomb was successfully detonated at Alamogordo, N. Mex. On August 6, 1945, and August 9, 1945, atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan, respectively.

During the summer of 1944, the problem of postwar control of nuclear energy began to receive serious consideration. In a memorandum of July 27, Conant advocated the formation of a "commission on atomic energy" to be charged with postwar development of nuclear energy for civilian and military purposes. Over the next few months, Conant, along with Bush, urged the establishment of such a commission.

On May 4, 1945, Stimson appointed an Interim Committee on S-1 "to survey and make recommendations on postwar research, development, and controls, as well as legislation necessary to effectuate them." The committee was chaired by the Secretary of War and also included Secretary of State James F. Byrnes, Assistant Secretary of State William L. Clayton, Undersecretary of the Navy Ralph A. Bard, OSRD's Karl T. Compton, Bush, and Conant. The work of the Interim Committee eventually resulted in the establishment of the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) by the Atomic Energy Act of August 1, 1946 (Public Law 585, 79th Cong.; 60 Stat. 755). All phases of nuclear energy research and production came under the control of the AEC on January 1, 1947.

The Manhattan Engineer District continued about 6 months longer, solely as an administrative agency to close out the project and handle personnel assigned to the AEC during the transition period. On December 31, 1946, a joint Army-Navy organization, the Armed Forces Special Weapons Project (AFSWP), was established to assume the military functions of the Manhattan Engineer District.

As of June 1946, there were some 12,300 linear feet of Manhattan Engineer District records on hand. Under Executive

Order 9816, dated December 31, 1946, personnel and properties of the Manhattan Engineer District, "including records owned by or in the possession, custody, or control" of the District, were transferred to the AEC. General Groves, however, retained custody of some 72 linear feet of records, primarily those documenting significant War Department policies and actions or pertaining to military operations; included among these was Groves' "Top Secret" correspondence. When Groves became Chief, Armed Forces Special Weapons Project, he maintained the files in the Project's custody. This practice was continued during the tenures of his successors, Maj. Gen. Kenneth D. Nichols and Maj. Gen. Herbert B. Loper.

Upon General Loper's retirement, the records were removed to the custody of General Nichols, then Chief, Research and Development, Office of the Chief of Staff. When General Nichols retired in 1953, the files were transferred to the physical custody of the Adjutant General of the Army under arrangements made by General Groves with the Office of the Chief of Staff. In 1958, they were transferred, along with many other Army records, to the custody of the National Archives and Records Service (NARS) in Alexandria, Va. Physical transfer of the files to the National Archives Building, Washington, D.C., was made in 1968.

#### Records Description

##### *Arrangement, Finding Aids, and Content of Records*

The "Top Secret" correspondence is arranged in two subseries. Subseries I, "Top Secret Manhattan Project Files," is divided into numbered files 1-20 and 23-28, and thereunder subdivided into alphabetical subfiles (sections or tabs). There are no files for numbers 21 and 22. Subseries II, titled "Top Secret Documents of Special Interest to General Groves," consists of 19 numbered files, similarly subdivided, and 6 miscellaneous files. Descriptive Listings of Files for both subseries (except for the six miscellaneous files in subseries II) appear at the beginning of roll 1. These finding aids appear to have been prepared during the late 1940's and early 1950's, when the records were in the custody of the AFSWP. Although imperfect, they list most of the documents in the individual files and generally reflect the present arrangement. Additionally, some of the individual subfiles or dossiers have their own tables of contents. For a simplified listing of numbered files in both subseries, see Appendixes A and B following these introductory remarks. The miscellaneous files in Subseries II are described in Appendix C.

Most of the "Top Secret" correspondence consists of letters, reports, and memorandums. Other types of records include

messages, telegrams, and cables; directives, notes and drafts; minutes and agenda of meetings; transcripts of telephone conversations; histories, studies, and reference compilations; draft and printed copies of speeches, press releases, legislation, and international agreements; biographical data; maps, charts, and photographs; newspaper clippings and excerpts; and miscellaneous printed material. A number of duplicate documents have been retained in the files, but in most instances they have not been microfilmed.

The correspondence is primarily to or from General Groves and his principal subordinates such as then Col. Kenneth D. Nichols, the District Engineer at Oak Ridge. Also among the correspondents are the Secretary of War and his special assistants, George L. Harrison and Harvey H. Bundy; the President and Secretary of State, along with other State Department and White House officials; U.S. military officials and officers, including those from the offices of the Chief of Staff, Chief of Engineers, Joint Chiefs of Staff, Army Air Forces, and overseas commands; British and Canadian Embassy officials and other personnel involved with nuclear policy and development; officials and scientists in OSRD, especially Bush and Conant; and scientists or military officers employed by or associated with the Manhattan Project.

The subject matter of the correspondence relates to technical, scientific, and fiscal problems; relations with allied powers in nuclear affairs, including U.S. involvement in such international agreements and accords as the Quebec Agreement of August 19, 1943, and the Combined Development Trust of June 13, 1944; preparations for and results of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki; special military operations, including the air attack against the uranium and thorium works in Oranienburg, Germany, the 1943 bombing of the Norwegian heavy water plant, and Operation PEPPERMINT for defense against possible German use of radioactive contaminants; intelligence activities, including the Alsos missions in Italy and Germany; relations with the Congress and private industry; security problems; the search for vitally needed natural resources; the status of foreign scientists vis-a-vis employment and patents; legislation for postwar development and control of nuclear energy; and official Government policy.

#### *Security Classification*

Although none of the documents reproduced in this microfilm publication are now security classified, most were classified "Top Secret" or "Secret" at one time or another, and had those security classification markings stamped, typed, or written on them. The AEC reviewed the security classification of the entire series in February 1961, marking various

folders "Declassified" and not containing "Restricted Data." The Department of the Army subsequently reviewed the classification and marked various folders "Regraded Unclassified." Between 1973 and 1979, NARS staff members reviewed and declassified documents and canceled classification markings. All records or collections of records that NARS could not declassify have been withdrawn from the files. The documents removed have been replaced by withdrawal notices, which identify the items and indicate the reasons for their removal.

#### Related Records

In addition to the "Top Secret" correspondence, the Manhattan Engineer District records in RG 77 include general correspondence arranged by the War Department decimal classification scheme; directives; investigatory, fiscal, and intelligence files; and reports relating to bomb tests. Available as a NARS microfilm publication is *Harrison-Bundy Files Relating to the Development of the Atomic Bomb, 1942-1946*, M1108. Records of the AFSWP and its successors, the Defense Atomic Support Agency and the Defense Nuclear Agency, are in Records of the Defense Nuclear Agency, RG 374. Included therein and reproduced as a NARS microfilm publication is the *Manhattan District History* (A1218). This multivolume work was compiled at General Groves' direction by Gavin Hadden, a civilian employee of the Manhattan Project.

General Groves' personal papers, dated 1941-70, are found in National Archives Gift Collection, RG 200. They include correspondence, speeches, publications, newspaper clippings, diaries, and photographs, much of which relate to General Groves' role in the Manhattan Project and the postwar development of nuclear energy. Records of the Office of Scientific Research and Development, RG 227, include information relating to the atomic bomb project, and are particularly important for the years preceding the formation of the Manhattan Engineer District. Of particular interest is a series of Bush-Conant correspondence dated 1941-47, relating to S-1.

These introductory remarks were written by Elizabeth P. Epps and revised by Robert H. Gruber, who also prepared the records for filming.



APPENDIX A

Numerical Listing of Contents of Files and Subfiles,  
Subseries I - Top Secret Manhattan Project Files.

<u>File</u>	<u>Subfile</u>	<u>Subject</u>
1		Research, Development, and Use of Atomic Energy for Peace and War
2		Production, Operations, Raw Materials, and Construction
3		Stockpile, Storage, and Military Characteristics
4		TRINITY Test (at Alamogordo, July 16, 1945)
5		Events Preceding and Following the Dropping of the First Atomic Bombs at Hiroshima and Nagasaki
	A	Publicity
	B	Directives, Memorandums, etc., to and from the Chief of Staff, Secretary of War, etc.
	C	Preparation and Movement of Personnel and Equipment to Tinian
	D	Selection of Targets
	E	TERMINAL Cables
	F	Memorandums from (Capt. W. S.) Parsons
	G	Radiological Effects
	H	Damage Reports
	I	Notes Taken in Chicago
6		Use of Fissionable Materials in European War
7		War Department Special Operations
	A	Establishment of French Zone of Occupation in Europe

<u>File</u>	<u>Subfile</u>	<u>Subject</u>
7		War Department Special Operations
	B	Operation HARBORAGE
	C	Auergesellschaft (Works in Oranienburg, Germany for Processing Uranium and Thorium)
	D	Operation PEPPERMINT
	E	Norsk Hydro Incident - Bombing of Norwegian Heavy Water Plant, 1943
	F	Alsos Mission - Germany
8		Operation CROSSROADS
9		Committees
	A	Interim Committee
	B	Combined Development Trust and Combined Policy Committee Meetings
10		International Control of Atomic Energy
11		Correspondence with Foreign Nations
12		Intelligence and Security
13		Legislation (for Atomic Energy)
14		Budget and Fiscal
15		Transfer of Manhattan Engineer District to Atomic Energy Commission
16		Special Reports
	A	Summary of Facts Relating to Breach of Quebec Agreement
	B	Report of Negotiations in England for Obtaining and Controlling Uranium Ore Supplies, Maj. Harry S. Traynor, Apr. 12, 1944
	C	Report of Negotiations in England for Obtaining and Controlling Uranium Ore Supplies, Maj. Harry S. Traynor, May 22, 1944

<u>File</u>	<u>Subfile</u>	<u>Subject</u>
16		Special Reports
	D	Copies of Documents Pertaining to Negotiations Which Preceded the Agreement with Belgium
	E	Report of Gun Assembled Nuclear Bomb, Oct. 6, 1945
17		Specific Information on LB (Little Boy Bomb)
18		Specific Information on FM (Fat Man Bomb)
19		Program at Y (Los Alamos)
20		Miscellaneous
21		No File
22		No File
23		Military Policy Committee, Minutes of Meetings
24		Memorandums to (Gen.) L. R. Groves Covering Two Meetings with the President (Dec. 30, 1944, and Apr. 25, 1945)
25		Documents Removed from Gen. (L. R.) Groves' Locked Box, Plus Certain Documents of Historical Importance (Including Correspondence of Groves and Vannevar Bush with the President)
26		Files Received from Col. Seeman's Section (Foreign Intelligence)
	A	Aide Memoire (and Comments re. French Scientists and Patents)
	B	Aide Memoire (Comments, and Related Papers re. American Contacts with British and French Scientists on Patents and Other Matters)
	C	Secretary of War Letters
	D	Patents (French and Australian)

<u>File</u>	<u>Subfile</u>	<u>Subject</u>
26		Files Received from Col. Seeman's Section (Foreign Intelligence)
	E	Terms and Processes (Including Report on Production Methods Used in Separation of U-235 from Natural Uranium)
	F	(Vannevar) Bush's Letters
	G	Disposition of (French) Personnel (Working on Canadian N. R. X. Project)
	H	Agreement (Hans H. van Halban and Lew Kowarski, re. Patents, Sept. 22, 1942)
	I	Cables
	J	(Lt. Col. John) Lansdale's Reports (re. French Patents and Participation in Nuclear Program)
	K	(J. F.) Jackson's Letters (re. French Scientists)
	L	Miscellaneous (Breach of Quebec Agreement and French Scientists)
	M	Technical and Scientific Mission for Pacific Theater (Alsos)
	N	Alsos Mission to Italy
	O	Pacific Mission
	P	Navy Technical Mission - Alsos
	Q	Alsos Mission (Miscellaneous)
	R	Shark Mission to Italy
27		Miscellaneous Top Secret Documents from Gen. L. R. Groves' Safe (re. Background Information on Atomic Development and its Promotion by International Coopera- tion, Supplies and Shipments of Radio- active Materials and Bomb Components, and Airborne Atomic Laboratory Facilities)
28		Status and Summary Reports of DSM (Development of Substitute Materials) Project, 1943-46

## APPENDIX B

Numerical Listing of Contents of Files, Subseries II - Top Secret Documents of Special Interest to General Groves

<u>File</u>	<u>Subject</u>
1	Organization Charts (Manhattan Engineer District)
2	Report to the National Policy Committee, May 28, 1945
3	Interim Committee and Scientific Panel (Including Report of Committee on Postwar Policy, Dec. 28, 1944)
4	Program at Y (Los Alamos)
5	Production at Hanford
6	Experiments on Separation and Thermal Diffusion
7	Equipment and Procedures in the K-25 Plant (Oak Ridge)
8	Notes on Atomic Energy Conference at Fort Belvoir, Virginia, Sept. 23-26, 1946
9	Union Mines Contract, Sept. 27, 1944
10	CO-1726 (Report on Electromagnetic System of Tubealloy Isotopes Separation, Jan. 15, 1945)
11	Foreign Personnel at Y (Los Alamos), 1944-46
12	Y-12 and K-25 Production Increases (Oak Ridge)
13	Background Information (on Development of Atomic Energy, British Contributions Thereto, and Interchange of Information between U.S. and Great Britain)
14	Russian Situation
15	Citation for Capt. Joseph Volpe
16	Report by A. F. Birch on "Gun Gadget"

<u>File</u>	<u>Subject</u>
17	Miscellaneous (re. Expenditures and Appropriations for the Manhattan Project, its Present and Future Status, and Foreign Patents)
18	Radiological Defense (Against Possible German Use of Radioactive Contaminants)
19	Contracts (with E. I. du Pont de Nemours & Co.)

APPENDIX C

Descriptive Listing of Miscellaneous Files in Subseries II

<u>Miscellaneous File No.</u>	<u>Summary of Contents</u>
1	Reports, correspondence, memorandums, notes, and chronologies relating to such matters as the atomic bombing of Japan, international agreements and cooperation in atomic energy, and classification status of various documents, 1944-50.
2	Letters of Apr. 16, 1943, Gen. Leslie R. Groves to Dr. R. C. Tolman re. production at Los Alamos and June 1, 1945, George Scatchard to James B. Conant and Conant to Scatchard re. the SAM (Substitute Alloy Materials) Laboratory. Also an incomplete copy of minutes of the Combined Policy Committee (1944?)
3	Notebook titled "The Atomic Bomb" containing statements by the President and Secretary of War relative to the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and a copy of the Aug. 1945 report by H. D. Smythe titled "A General Account of the Development of Methods of Using Atomic Energy for Military Purposes under the Auspices of the United States Government, 1940-1945."
4	Reports, letters, memorandums, and draft material relating to the status of programs at Oak Ridge, Hanford, and Los Alamos, 1943-45
5	Undated reference notebook containing information relating to uranium and thorium as to its occurrence, geographical distribution, mining, production, uses, costs, and procurement by international agreements. Also documents relating to the transfer of property of the Armed Forces Special Weapons Project at Sandia Base, New Mexico, to the Department of the Air Force at Keesler Air Force Base, Mississippi, 1948-49.

Miscellaneous

File No.

Summary of Contents

6

"Chronology of District X, June 17-Oct. 28, 1942." Col. James C. Marshall's day-by-day diary of events covering the establishment of the Manhattan Engineer District and its early operations.



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5	Files 11 - 19 Miscellaneous Files 1 - 6