

Reflections on the atomic blast test in Nevada

By Joni Tevis, High Country News

Nevada Test Site, 1953

Put yourself in his shoes: cold, Army-issue, treads packed with sand. Rise before dawn, climb into the truck and bump down the road to Doom Town. As the convoy tops the last ridge, narrow your eyes at the rising sun's brilliant seam. Showtime. Up the ladder you go, sun already warm on your neck, roof shingles softening underfoot, nail heads gleaming silver.

The day wears on in pounding and shouts as you move down the line, lapping layers tight enough to turn any water, although this roof will never see rain. Down below, masons raise the chimney a row at a time, scraping excess mortar free. The painters spray the siding, not bothering to tape the windows; time is of the essence. Saltbrush shivers on the ridge and smashed jackrabbits stain the road as you ride back to Mercury Camp, work done, clothes heavy with sweat and tar, paint and dirt, tacky with sap from lumber that was a tree six months ago.

Operation Doorstep-Shot Annie, 1953

Full dark over a silent house. See how easy it is to make a family, twins sprawled on the floor, Baby in his high chair, Mother bending near, a spoonful of pears in her shapely hand. J.C. Penney provided the mannequins and wardrobe: rompers for the twins, footed sleeper for Baby, and Mother's sensible skirt, button-front blouse, clip earrings. (Daddy's at work, offstage.)

The bomb will detonate in a minute's time.

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