



Now It Can Be Told: The Story Of The Manhattan Project

Leslie R. Groves , Edward Teller (Introduction)

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(Introduction)

General Leslie Groves and J. Robert Oppenheimer were the two men chiefly responsible for the building of the first atomic bomb at Los Alamos, code name "The Manhattan Project." As the ranking military officer in charge of marshalling men and material for what was to be the most ambitious, expensive engineering feat in history, it was General Groves who hired Oppenheimer (with knowledge of his left-wing past), planned facilities that would extract the necessary enriched uranium, and saw to it that nothing interfered with the accelerated research and swift assembly of the weapon. This is his story of the political, logistical, and personal problems of this enormous undertaking which involved foreign governments, sensitive issues of press censorship, the construction of huge plants at Hanford and Oak Ridge, and a race to build the bomb before the Nazis got wind of it. The role of Groves in the Manhattan Project has always been controversial. In his new introduction the noted physicist Edward Teller, who was there at Los Alamos, candidly assesses the general's contributions-and Oppenheimer's-while reflecting on the awesome legacy of their work.

Now It Can Be Told: The Story Of The Manhattan Project Details

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Jacob says

Remember this is first person account by the general in charge of the Manhattan Project. You get a very matter of fact retelling of what Groves saw and dealt with. In some ways this is the ultimate project management tale. Groves goes into details on some of the political activities, but the narrative is mostly about how Groves and his team dealt with all of the unknowns.

And there were a lot of unknowns. Obviously how and if a bomb could be created wasn't known. There were also tremendous questions faced about how to deal with allies, what to do about counter-intelligence, and how to get materials for the massive construction projects.

Groves didn't really have to worry about costs, but time was a huge pressure. The scale of the project is unprecedented and fascinating to grasp. It'd be nice to dream we could put the same energy to other ends.

Dan Slimmon says

It's by a general, so as you might expect, it's not very imaginatively written. But it's informative, and there are some interesting bits. I especially liked the insight into the reactions of Germany's atomic physicists when they learned that the construction of an atomic bomb was not only feasible but accomplished.

The events covered by this book are compelling and consequential enough to make up for the dryness of the writing.

Glenn says

Leslie Groves's book is one of the most revealing and compelling accounts of complex project management I have ever read. If you read this account for its project management insights - planning, communication, stakeholder management, etc. - you won't be disappointed. If you are more interested in Technical, Scientific detail -- read Richard Rhodes.

Groves, whose previous project had been the building of the Pentagon, was placed in charge of what is arguably the largest and most complex pre-digital-age project in history, a high-security, deadline driven project with a huge number of moving parts, involving a combined workforce and stakeholder community of over 600,000. Components of this project spread from coast to coast across the US, to Great Britain and even to the Belgian Congo. In addition, Groves was given all responsibility for intelligence gathering on German Technology -- both nuclear and non-nuclear. (Other recommended readings -- anything on the ALSOS mission.)

He provides technical detail where needed to illustrate the Project Management decision making, his mistakes and how he might have avoided them, the mistakes of others and how he might have mitigated them, the political positioning between the US and Britain, the personalities, discussions, conflicts and resolutions that resulted in the birth of the nuclear age.

To learn how a great project manager made decisions, read Groves.

Don says

A bureaucrat's history of building the bomb. There is an enormous contrast between this and Rhode's History of the Atomic Bomb. Groves' history is clearly the history not of the bomb, but of the Manhattan Project. We are treated to names and biographies of minor staff officers, but the scientists at Los Alamos are largely just "the scientists". We see Groves worry about the constitutionality of funding mechanisms, but not even recognize the possibility of constitutional problems with his nationwide news censorship scheme. Interesting, if largely because of what it reveals about the mindset of those in charge of the project, rather than what it tells about the project itself.

Tim says

This is a book for a relatively small audience, though it is fascinating. It is the story of the development of the atom bomb, created during WW II, with facilities in Tennessee, Washington State, Illinois, New Mexico, and other places. Its written by the General who was placed in charge of the effort by FDR - he has a direct writing style, just explaining the narrative.

We can read hundred's of books and viewpoints whether the bomb should have been used, that isn't what this book covers.

Nick Black says

Most of what's in here has been diced and reserved numerous times in the Manhattan canon, though some of Groves's highly right-wing asides are delicious, and were new to me. More valuable than anything is the conversational detail we learn of the Major General.

I was reading this as I heard of the Sendai earthquake and tsunami, prompting me to comment "Tonight Japan's gonna party like it was 1945." Given the resulting Fukushima partial melt, I suppose 1986 might have been more apt.

Alexander Temerev says

An excellent review of the Manhattan Project from the management side. Leslie Groves is an organizational superhero.

Wardo says

This is General Leslie Groves' first person account of the unbelievably gargantuan effort that led to the

creation of the atomic bomb during World War II. It is best read in tandem with Richard Rhodes' "The Making of the Atomic Bomb." But keep in mind that these are accounts extolling the virtuous aspects of the project. Read a third book, "On the Home Front" by Michele Gerber, for a straightforward and scholarly telling of the environmental havoc wreaked by the ensuing Cold War on Hanford, Washington. (In fact, you might read Gerber's book first. Then you can laugh when General Groves points out what "extraordinary" measures they took to protect the fish in the Columbia River.) These books left me wondering: What could be accomplished if governments and people could apply the same resources, energy, and ingenuity to eliminating poverty and disease that get applied to making war?

Peter says

I've been fascinated with the Manhattan Project sine I was a teenager (and that was a loooong time ago!) So, this is a look at it from the point of view of the Man In Charge - General Leslie Groves.

A somewhat plodding read, but does give some of the 'higher level' views of the Manhattan Engineering District (the code name for the project). Groves is light on technical details, heavy on the choice-of-personnel, and medium on some of the political maneuvering between the allies (Britain, USA, Russia, free France etc) as the project was established and then was clearly on the road to success. Being a General, and a straightshooter, he doesn't gloss over the (few) errors they made on the way to the bomb nor does he try to hide the difficulty in the decisions - would it work?, which process to use? etc.

It's also an interesting historical read for some of the sidelights - at Oak Ridge they built separate towns for the blacks and the whites for example - that give us more of a sense of how the real world was only sixty years ago.

As an overall picture of a mammoth engineering project, taken on despite the lack of solid knowledge about the materials involved or the processes required, it's well worth it if you are interested in the Manhattan Project.

Ari says

Groves' memoir about the Manhattan Project. It's not a substitute for a general history of the project, since it starts in September 1942, when Groves took charge. And many technical details are omitted. But as a history of the administrative and industrial side, it's fascinating and invaluable. Groves is a fine writer, and shares a great deal of his thoughts and intentions.

Ross Safford says

Good reading

Good reading

It helped me to do some reading on the subject of the Manhattan Project before reading General Groves' account of the project. It gave me a better understanding of some of the challenges that Groves faced. It is a well-written and concise account of one of the most incredible periods in human history.

Dan Cohen says

An interesting account of the Manhattan project by the General who led it and who features, of course, in countless other accounts and dramatisations of the project. It's a little bureaucratic in tone and the author is careful to list military, political and business participants carefully which serves to remind us that the project was much more than the scientific endeavour that's the usual focus of accounts. Not scintillating reading but an important member of the corps of books on the subject.

Monte Lamb says

You can tell an engineer wrote this book as it is no nonsense with a lot of declarative sentences. It is a terrific story on how all the different things needed to develop, design, and manufacture the atomic bomb. What it does not do nor attempt to do is discuss the science work done at Los Alamos. Instead it focuses on what is needed for the bomb, how it was manufactured, and all the necessary security and management needed. It does a very good job of putting the story together in very readable chapters based upon different topics. It is an excellent telling of the full story of the development and use of the bomb in World War II.

Len Blasiol says

A great story, exceptionally well-told. General Groves was not only a superb leader and a brilliant engineer, but also a quite talented writer. His straightforward and concise style conveys a remarkable amount of information in a very smooth "flow." He is honest, to the point of being blunt, leaving the reader assured of the accuracy of the account.

The thing that impressed me the most about this book was the story of a complex and high-risk undertaking, aggressively directed. Groves weighed the risks at every turn, and made the decisions that were necessary to keep the project on track. This is a great story for all Project Managers.

Highly recommended...

Sandor J. says

Inside story of the Manhattan Project.

This memoir, like all memoirs, is especially helpful to students of the Manhattan Project, because it comes "directly from the horse's mouth." While there are many good histories of the Project available, this one is uniquely insightful because of its first-hand testimony. It is a pity that J.R. Oppenheimer did not write similar memoirs.
