

BRITAIN EXPLODES ATOM-BOMB

Off North West Australia are the Monte Belle islands. Far beyond normal shipping routes they lie, and, until 1952, only pearl-fishing boats entered the blue waters that lap the cliffs surrounding their shores. Barren, unfertile rocks where no man lives - buffeted by winds blowing in from the ocean - scorched by a dazzling sun that beats upon her empty beaches: this was the place chosen to explode Britain's first atomic weapon. Early in the year, equipment began to arrive from Britain for the great experiment in ships of Her Majesty's Navy. On board were men of the Royal Engineers and the Royal Marines. Upon them fell the task of handling the delicate equipment and preparing the islands for the dangerous test.

Through many months they worked, and then came Dr. Penney to direct the whole operation and (with his fellow-scientists) to make his final plans. But there was still much to be done - many roads had still to be laid for the heavy transport, and materials to be moved into the actual site for tests.

Shelters, similar to war-time Andersons, were erected in the immediate blast area; and concrete block structures were built at intervals from the centre of the explosion. Finally, all preparations were completed - and the last group of scientists left the islands.....

All was still on shore - the islands were deserted. Yet somewhere in their midst rested the atomic weapon, second only to the Hydrogen bomb as the most destructive weapon the world has ever known. Out at sea, on board the "Campania," Dr. Penney and his team made final adjustments to their instruments in the control laboratory.

One minute to go -- slowly the seconds tick away.

Thousands of tons of water, mud and sand blackened the gigantic fireball. Like a huge boiling cauldron, the cloud billowed upwards to a height of ten thousand feet within two minutes.

Rear Admiral Torlesse (who was in command of the operation) and Dr. Penney turned to watch the great cloud after its initial,

blinding flash was over. Somewhere out there the ship carrying the weapon had been vapourised. Smoke rose higher and higher, the strong wind twisting and sprawling it until it was a mile wide at its centre and about two-and-a-half miles high.

To Dr. Penney and his team great credit is due for this mighty British achievement. The spectacular success of the operation furthers our hopes of peace - for it seems that by the possession of such deadly weapons peace can be maintained in this troubled world.