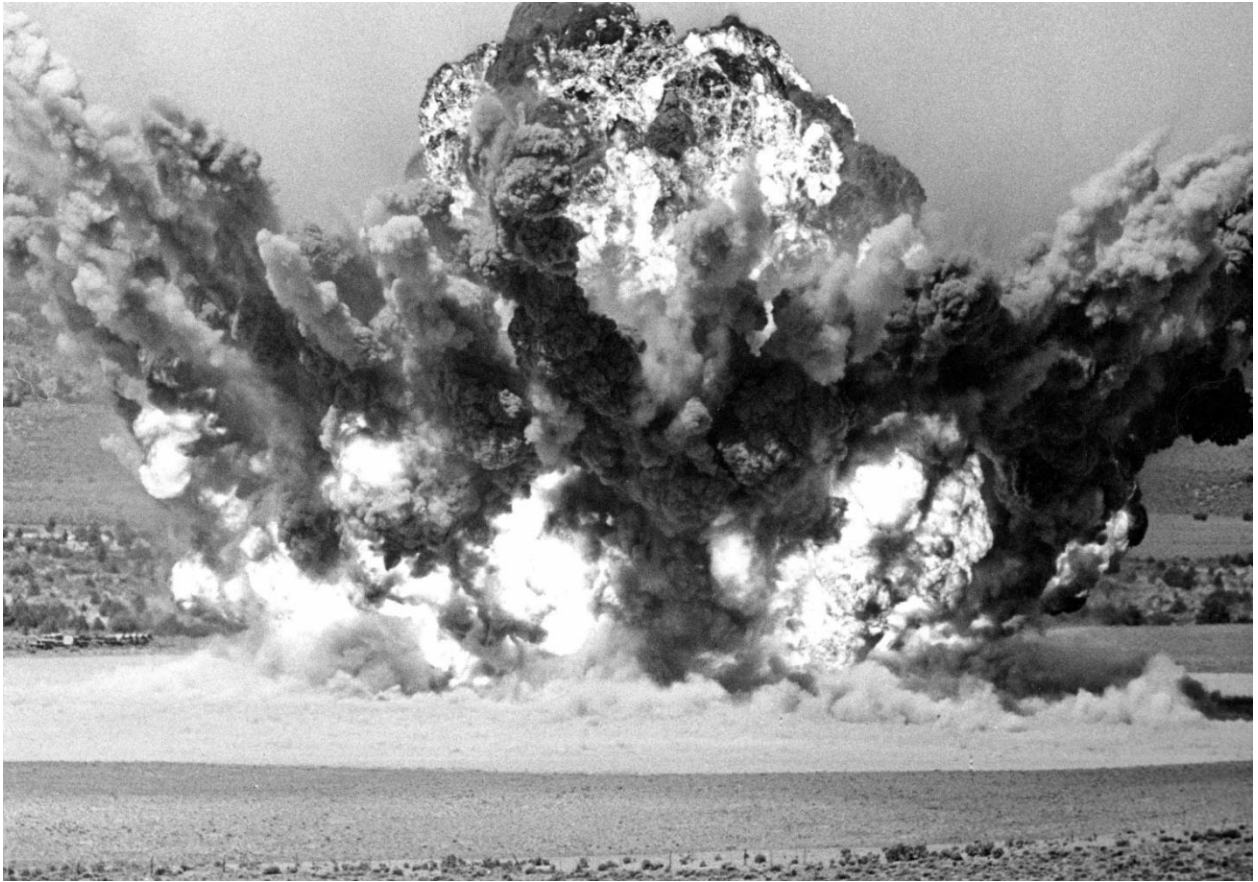


## 1972 nuclear tests on Glade Park shook up earth, residents



*The explosion of 500 tons of TNT on Nov. 13, 1972, on Glade Park, as witnessed from the observation area. Robert Grant photo collection*

By Kathy Jordan

Operation Mixed Company sounds like a title for a movie .

It was not a movie but the name the Nuclear Defense Agency had given a series of eight nuclear blasts scheduled to begin Thursday, June 1, 1972, at 11 a.m.

Grand Junction had been buzzing with talk about the nuclear test scheduled to take place on Glade Park about 18 miles southwest of town.

According to a news report in The Daily Sentinel, the blast went off at exactly on schedule, and within four seconds “a mushroom-shaped, charcoal-colored cloud ascended against the blue sky as the sound and a slight air blast were felt.”

This blast was the first of eight scheduled by NDA to learn its effects on the sandstone geological formations and a variety of structures that had been constructed at the site on Glade Park.

People were curious, and most likely somewhat concerned about what effects a 20-ton blast of TNT would have on homes and businesses.

While those in town waited to learn about after-effects, about 50 people had gathered at an observation area more than one mile from the blast site.

Some folks in the valley said they felt their houses shake a little, but, for the most part, no one reported hearing or feeling anything.

The last of eight tests was done on Monday, Nov. 13. It was a 500-ton blast. It left a crater 14 feet deep and 160 feet wide, which the military assured the landowner would be refilled with dirt and planted with grass.

According to The Sentinel news story, various military equipment was included in this test to gauge the air blast and ground-shock affects.

Targets included parked helicopters, a remotely controlled flying helicopter, parked tanks and personnel carriers, bunkers, an aircraft shelter and foxholes. The NDA was also quick to assure the public that nearby water wells and springs would be checked for adverse affects.

There were reports of broken windows in the five-to-six-mile range from ground zero, but these repairs were quickly dealt with, according to military spokesmen. Some Glade Park residents reported feeling the ground shake from the blast.

A friend of ours, who asked that I not use his name, watched the preparation for the tests from its beginning.

He said that the last blast was the most interesting because it was the one in which they set off 500 tons of explosives. Watching the blast from the observation area, he said that as the shock wave came across to the observation area, the sagebrush appeared to be rolling. As the shock wave got to the observation area it felt like it was rolling through his body.

He said there had been three large concrete re-enforced hangars built at the site and that the plutonium trigger had been placed on a large tower in the middle of the hangars.

Before the blast, the hangars were filled with airplanes and helicopters to test the impact on equipment. When the blast went off, the equipment was destroyed and the steel doors blew off one hangar but the other two remained intact.

A new Army tank was placed at the blast site, and it was blown two and one-half miles from ground zero.

Our friend helped with the cleanup and said that at the end of each day a Geiger counter was passed over the participants to test for radioactive exposure. After one such test he was told not to have an X-ray for five years.

Several of us working at the Sentinel on both mornings couldn't contain our curiosity and stepped outside hoping that we would see something of the blast. And we did. We could see the dark mushroom-shaped cloud as it appeared on the horizon in back of the monument. The cloud from the last blast was somewhat larger than the cloud from the first one.

At the time it was an eerie feeling to me, as I stood there looking at the mushroom cloud. I had visions of hiding under our desks in grade school as we went through the drill on what we were supposed to do in case of a nuclear attack. I also remember thinking that I hoped we wouldn't die from exposure to radiation from that cloud.

I didn't feel the earth move under my feet, but I did hear a noise like that of a sonic boom, and I got to witness some Western Slope history.