

THE NAVY AND OPERATION DOMINIC

A PHOTOGRAPH TRIGGERS AN EXAMINATION OF ONE OF AMERICA'S DEADLIEST SERIES OF ATOMIC BOMB TESTS AND HOW THE US NAVY PARTICIPATED IN A MAJOR COLD WAR EVENT
BY NICHOLAS A. VERONICO

Why would a NAS Alameda-based Lockheed P2V Neptune be wearing a mushroom cloud insignia in the early 1960s? The insignia, seen on the port nose gear door of the famed patrol bomber represents the aircraft's participation in Operation *Dominic I*. These tests consisted of 36 nuclear explosions that were conducted at the height of the Cold War. The *Dominic* tests were in response to the Soviet Union's resumption

of atmospheric atomic tests following a three-year moratorium, which concluded on 1 September 1961. *Dominic II* was a series of land-based nuclear events at the Nevada Test Site.

The tests comprised 31 nuclear blasts with a 38.1 megaton total yield. *Dominic* was scheduled very rapidly

as a response in kind to the Soviet resumption of nuclear testing after the tacit 1958/1961 test moratorium. As a response to the Soviet tests, President John F. Kennedy authorized Operation *Dominic*, which was the largest nuclear weapons testing program ever conducted by the United States.

The *Dominic I* tests

This is the photograph that triggered the article. The US Navy's VP-872 returned to NAS Alameda in June 1962, when photographer William T. Larkins shot this photo of the squadron's P2V-5Fs. Note the Project *Dominic* mushroom cloud logo on the port nose gear door. (William T. Larkins)



Operation *Dominic*'s *Chama* shot on 18 October 1962 at Johnston Island was a retarded parachute drop.



Jacket patch from Operation *Dominic*.