

# Death of the Bikini Fleet

Operation Crossroads gathered together an unprecedented fleet of American, German, and Japanese warships. The purpose of this assembly in a remote area of the Pacific Ocean was to test the effectiveness of America's atomic bombs. Today, the area is a stark reminder to the power of the new generation of weapons

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Between 1944 and today, estimates are that the world's superpowers built more than 128,000 nuclear weapons — hydrogen bombs, fission bombs, fusion bombs, clean bombs, dirty bombs, neutron bombs, strategic nuclear weapons, tactical nuclear weapons, intercontinental ballistic missiles with MIRVs (Multiple Independent Reentry Vehicles), air- and sea-launched nuclear-tipped cruise missiles, artillery shells that delivered nuclear destruction, and little nuclear weapons that could be toss-bombed from aircraft as small as a Douglas A-4 Skyhawk. The Americans and the Soviet Union developed 98% of all the weapons; nuclear bombs for any and all engagements with the enemy, no matter how big or how small.

There were weapons tests in the atmosphere, below ground, and under water. They even cooked-off a nuclear bomb



A-bomb of Test Able detonates 520-feet above the surface of the Bikini Atoll on 1 July 1946.



*Sunset Bikini Fleet* is an oil painting executed by Charles Bittinger, one of several artists assigned by the USN to cover Operation Crossroads. The painting shows sunset on 30 June after the support fleet had evacuated Bikini Atoll and steamed to positions over ten miles away. Left behind was the target fleet, full of darkened ships awaiting their fate the coming morning. (Naval History and Heritage Command)



View of Able detonation seen from the USS Fall River (CA-131). (NHHC)

only 500 miles off the coast of San Diego as part of Operation Wigwam, and gamblers in Las Vegas could see mushroom clouds on the horizon as bombs exploded at the Nevada Test Site in the 1950s.

The United States conducted 235 atmospheric nuclear weapons shots between 1945 and 1962 (the year of the last US atmospheric test), when above ground, underwater, or space-based tests were halted with the 5 August 1963, signing of "The Limited Nuclear Test Ban Treaty."



Baker Test's A-bomb is detonated underwater at 8:35 am on 25 July 1946.

## EXPANDING AMERICA'S NUCLEAR KNOWLEDGE

By the end of World War II, only three nuclear devices had been exploded, and there was a thirst for knowledge about what exactly one of these bombs could do, and how they could be employed as a weapon. The first atomic bomb was exploded on the desert, southwest of Socorro, New Mexico. That bomb test, code named *Trinity*, ushered in the nuclear age. The second device, code named *Little Boy* was

