WORLD WAR II FROM A NEW MEXICAN PERSPECTIVE

When war broke out in Europe and Asia in 1939, the War Department suggested to the National Guard that their 111th Cavalry convert to another branch of service. The age of the horse as a combatant had passed. Thus, the officers and non-commissioned officers of the command jointly selected coast artillery. In 1940, the 111th was re-designated the 200th Coast Artillery Regiment (AA) and the 158th was reorganized as the 104th Anti-Tank battalion. On January 6, 1940, these units, along with the 120th Engineer Regiment, were called to active duty for a one-year training period that became the prelude to some of the earliest combat experienced by American troops in World War II.

New Mexico in the 1940s also began to play a critical role in the emerging relationship between science and the military, which would grow rapidly in the decades to follow. This started with the testing of the variable-timed, radio, proximity-fused artillery shells that would be crucial to protecting the Navy's ships from Kamikazes and to the Army's defense of Bastogne, Belgium in 1944. Airplanes were suspended over the desert mesa near Kirtland between the tallest wooden towers in the world and used for targets.

The importance of the proximity fuze to the successful outcome of the Second World War is best stated by those who witnessed its effectiveness.

James V. Forrestal, Secretary of the Navy said, "The proximity fuze has helped blaze the trail to Japan. Without the protection this ingenious device has given the surface ships of the Fleet, our westward push could not have been so swift and the cost in men and ships would have been immeasurably greater."

Prime Minister, Winston S. Churchill was quoted with "These so-called proximity fuzes, made in the United States.., proved potent against the small unmanned aircraft (V-1) with which we were assailed in 1944."

And Commanding General of the Third Army, George S. Patton said, "The funny fuze won the Battle of the Bulge for us. I think that when all armies get this shell we will have to devise some new method of warfare."

200th COAST ARTILLERY REGIMENT (AA)

By August 1941, the 200th, under the Command of Colonel Charles G. Sage was given notice that it had been selected for an overseas assignment and was shipped out to the Philippines where the unit would be posted 75 miles north of Manila at Ft. Stotsenberg, the site of Clark Field. The regiment, which prior to 8 December 1941 had never actually fired a live round from either a 3-in or 37-mm anti-aircraft gun, was the largest single American outfit in the islands.

Early on 8 December the night radio crew picked up commercial broadcasts telling of the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor prompting the regiment to go on full alert. Afterward, bombers of the Japanese 11th Air Fleet comprised of both bombers and fighter planes arrived at 12:20 P.M, inflicting irreparable damage to American strategic capacity. Thanks to the 200th, seven of the 300 Japanese planes that flew in from Formosa that morning would never leave -- even though much of 200th's obsolete ammunition was faulty and did not detonate. Worse, the World War I style powder train fuses that the regiment was forced to use limited the effective elevation of their 3-in. guns to 20,000 feet – well below the altitude at which the Japanese multi-engine bombers learned to fly.

The next day brought with it the creation of the Provisional 200th Coast Artillery (AA) of Manila, subsequently designated the 515th Coast Artillery Regiment (AA). It was initially staffed with approximately one-third of the officers and troops of the 200th and sent to Manila under the Command of Lt. Colonel Harry M. Peck, Executive Officer of the 200th, in order to provide anti-aircraft protection for the city. There hundreds of conscripts were added to the regiment's complement. However, by Christmas the situation had deteriorated rapidly. The 200th had earlier assumed the responsibility of covering the retreat of the Northern Luzon Force into Bataan. So, the 515th maneuvered to provide

cover for the retreating Southern Luzon Force after Manila had been declared an "open" (undefended) city by General Douglas MacArthur.

Throughout the entire campaign the 200th and 515th in the process of destroying 86 Japanese aircraft expended approximately 23,000 rounds of 0.50 caliber ammunition, 6,900 rounds of 3-in. and 13,000 rounds of 37-mm ammunition, including the frequent duds and rounds also spent as field artillery. That equates to 80 3-in. rounds and 151 37-mm rounds expended for each enemy aircraft destroyed. By comparison, statistics compiled for the more advance 90-mm and 40-mm guns available during later campaigns of the Pacific Theater of Operations revealed that the rate of ammunition consumption for these evolved weapons varied from 898 to 121 rounds per kill for the 90-mm guns and 365-157 for the automatic 40-mm weapons with the lower expenditure rates achieved toward the end of the war.

During the Philippine Defense Campaign the 3-in. antiaircraft batteries of the 200th and 515th had been limited to 3 or 4 rounds per gun in each attack. And the 37-mm pieces were limited to 10 rounds each. That permitted the regiments to stay in action the whole way. But, on 6 April the limit was removed because the Japanese planes got "personal" about it, attacking the batteries themselves. Each regiment immediately increased daily expenditure rates to about 400 rounds of 3-in. ammunition and then set an all-time high on 8 April of nearly 1,000 rounds each.

Whenever a plane was brought down, everyone on Bataan knew it almost immediately. A certain unmistakable congratulatory yell had automatically developed with the first planes knocked down. How and who started it will remain a mystery forever. The fact remains that whenever the yell started, it was relayed and repeated all over Bataan, and everyone who heard it knew that another Japanese plane was out of business.

And, at the end when on 9 April General King ordered allied forces on Bataan to surrender, these two regiments constituted the last cohesive military force that remained in action to resist the Japanese. Control and communication were even maintained after they were ordered to stack arms. Before that,

however, these units unhesitatingly provided infantry support as the Allies' last line of defense along a ridge on the south side of Cabcaben Air Field at the tip of the Bataan peninsula.

The Battle of Bataan can be described as the last battle of World War I and the first battle of World War II. It used weapons only marginally improved from World War I and, therefore, tactics not unfamiliar to First War veterans. Yet the use of air power, tanks and mechanization placed Bataan in a newer time. It was a "come-as-you-are" war, one that was fought with the men and material on hand, un-reinforced (on the Allied side) by better trained men with evolutionary and revolutionary weapons. It was a battle that involved relatively few troops when compared to later campaigns. Of the defenders' sacrifices General MacArthur wrote, "History I am sure will record the defense of the Philippines as one of the decisive battles of the world. Its protracted struggle enabled the United Nations to gather strength to resist in the Pacific. Had it not held out, Australia would have fallen with incalculable results."

Significantly, these regiments and their leadership who, since the 1916-17 Punitive Expedition, had gained proficiency in the art of maneuver warfare, the use artillery, automatic weapons and infantry tactics acquitted themselves with honor during their four months of combat. In that short time these "Battling Bastards of Bataan" earned two Distinguished Service medals, four Presidential Unit Citations, and the Philippine Presidential Unit Citation plus battle credits for the Asiatic-Pacific campaign medal with one silver and one bronze battle star; Philippine Defense medal with one bronze battle star and the American Defense campaign medal with one bronze battle star.

On 9 April 1942 all of that mattered little when all 47,000 of the surviving, starving and disease-ravaged defenders of Bataan were ordered to experience the gravest humiliation suffered by U.S. forces up to that point.

Taken prisoner they were denied food and water, robbed of their personal possessions and equipment and subjected to the "Bataan Death March." The 65 mile forced march to San Fernando claimed the lives of 16,950 Americans and Filipinos many of whom were beheaded, bayoneted, clubbed or beaten and left

on the road side to die. They were then packed like sardines into enclosed, oven like, rail road cattle cars for transport to Camp O'Donnell, which prior to the war had been a poorly prepared training camp for Philippine Army recruits. Upon arrival, the 35,000 survivors discovered that there was only one working water faucet in the entire camp to which the Japanese would often deny their prisoners access. Hygiene was non-existent. Flies swarmed and dysentery was rampant. The Bataan Death March together with the torturous 40-month imprisonment that followed is the most devastating trauma endured by New Mexican soldiers in the modern era.

By war's end, only about half of the 1,800 New Mexicans who originally shipped out to the Philippines returned home. And only about half of those men survived another year. After the war, the Purple Heart, Bronze Star, Prisoner of War and "Mac Arthur" medals were awarded to all of the men who served in these units. A number of these troops were also individually awarded Silver Star Medals in recognition of their heroism in combat during the Philippine Defense Campaign.

ALBUQUERQUE ARMY AIR BASE

Ironically, the 19th Bombardment Group, one of a number of the Army Air Corps units protected at Ft. Stotsenberg by the 200th, had been stationed for four months at the Albuquerque Army Air Base in 1940. The base would go on to be designated as an Air Forces Advanced Flying School on 24 December 1941 where an initial fleet of 150 AT-11s would support a bombardier training school that was used as the location for the filming of the 1943 movie "Bombardier." The movie, featuring the Sandia Mountains in several scenes, stared Pat O'Brian, Randolph Scott, Robert Ryan, Anne Shirley and Eddie Albert who would become the helmsman of a Navy landing craft that ferried Marines to the beach in the first wave of the Tarawa invasion in the central Pacific.

In 1942 actor Jimmy Stewart was stationed in Albuquerque as an instructor where he taught pilots to fly AT-6, AT-9, and B-17 aircraft until the fall

of 1943 when he went to England as Commanding Officer of the 703rd Bomb Squadron, equipped with B-24s. Stewart ended the war with 20 combat missions and remained in the USAF Reserve. Brigadier General Stewart retired 31 May 1968.

Stewart talking Over the final details of a mission prior to takeoff.
Source: http://www.wpafb.af.mil/museum/history/wwii/js.htm

CODE TALKERS

While one group of New Mexicans struggled for survival as POWs, a unique group contributed directly to American success in the Pacific and ultimately their rescue. The Navajo Code Talkers, whose official contributions remained secret until the 1980s, played a crucial role in the American victory in the Pacific. In March 1942 the first unit of Code talkers was established. The 382d Platoon was made up of 29 Navajos who were volunteers from boarding schools in Shiprock, Fort Defiance, and Fort Wingate. Their undecipherable code required first the conversion of a military term into an image such as a "bear" that was common to the unwritten Navajo language and then translated into Navajo before it was spoken into a radio that could be intercepted by the enemy. Ultimately, more than 400 Navajo Code Talkers volunteered for duty throughout Europe and the Pacific. They saw their first service on Guadalcanal in August 1942. By the time the Marines landed on Iwo Jima in 1944, theirs was the only code used by American forces on the island.

120th COMBAT ENGINEERING BATTALION

Additionally, trained both in amphibious warfare and mountaineering, the New Mexico National Guard's 120th Engineers Combat Battalion led the assault landing teams of the 45th Infantry Division in the D-Day landing on the Sicilian coast on 10 July 1943 and participated in 22 straight days of fighting until the capitulation of all enemy forces remaining on Sicily.

On 10 September, the Battalion again went into action at Paestum, near Salerno, Italy to clear the way for a Division landing. The Division, after leaving the beach, turned inland toward the northeast in the direction of Benevento. The Battalion, as usual, was among the leading elements of the advance, destroying mine fields, building by-passes for destroyed bridges and otherwise accelerating the American advance. Their energy and courage, then and later, served to make them one of the elite fighting groups in the European Theater.

During 46 days of continuous fighting, the New Mexico Battalion bridged the tumultuous and unpredictable Volturno River, and proceeded to build pack trails, remove mine fields, and build bridges in the mountains around Venafro. They performed tasks that now seem like miracles but which at the time were accepted as a matter of course.

ERNIE PYLE

Journalist Ernie Pyle was embedded with the 45th Division throughout the Italian campaign and wrote daily dispatches from Italy:

> "I lived for a while on the Sicilian front with the 120th Engineers Battalion, attached to the 45th Division. The bulk of the 120th hailed from my adopted state of New Mexico. They were part of an old New Mexico outfit, most of which was lost on Bataan. It was good to get back to those slow-talking, wide and easy people of the desert, and good to speak of places like Las Cruces, Socorro, and Santa Rosa. It was good to find somebody who lived within sight of my own picket fence on the Mesa." ...
>
> "The engineers were very careful throughout the campaign about tearing up native property. They used much extra labor and time to

avoid damaging orchards, buildings, or vineyards. Sometimes they'd build a road clear around an orchard rather than through it."

"This consideration helped make us many friends here."

B***ILL MAULDIN***

Six days after the 120th Engineers had been relieved from the line and reassigned to special training, Pyle would also write about another iconic New Mexican, Bill Maulden:

" IN ITALY, January 15, 1944 -- Sgt. Bill Mauldin appears to us over here to be the finest cartoonist the war has produced. And that's not merely because his cartoons are funny, but because they are also terribly grim and real."

"Mauldin's cartoons aren't about training-camp life, which you at home are best acquainted with. They are about the men in the line - the tiny percentage of our vast army who are actually up there in that other world doing the dying. His cartoons are about the war."

"Mauldin's central cartoon character is a soldier, unshaven, unwashed, unsmiling. He looks more like a hobo than like your son. He looks, in fact, exactly like a doughfoot who has been in the lines for two months. And that isn't pretty."

"Mauldin's cartoons in a way are bitter. His work is so mature that I had pictured him as a man approaching middle age. Yet he is only twenty-two, and he looks even younger. He himself could never have raised the heavy black beard of his cartoon dogface. His whiskers are soft and scant, his nose is upturned good-naturedly, and his eyes have a twinkle."

"His maturity comes simply from a native understanding of things, and from being a soldier himself for a long time. He has been in the Army three and a half years."

"Bill Mauldin was born in Mountain Park, New Mexico. He now calls Phoenix home base, but we of New Mexico could claim him without much resistance on his part. Bill has drawn ever since he was a child. He always drew pictures of the things he wanted to grow up to be, such as cowboys and soldiers, not realizing that what he really wanted to become was a man who draws pictures. He graduated from high school in Phoenix at seventeen, took a year at the Academy of Fine Arts in Chicago, and at eighteen was in the Army. He did sixty-four days on KP duty in his first four months. That fairly cured him of a lifelong worship of uniforms."

"Mauldin belongs to the 45th Division. Their record has been a fine one, and their losses have been heavy. Mauldin's typical grim cartoon soldier is really a 45th Division infantryman, and he is one who has truly been through the mill." ...

"After the war he wants to settle again in the Southwest, which he and I love. He wants to go on doing cartoons of these same guys who are now fighting in the Italian hills, except that by then they'll be in civilian clothes and living as they should be."

"Joe, yestiddy ya saved my life an' I swore I'd pay ya back. Here's my last pair of dry socks."

After the war Mauldin freelanced for a time, joined the St. Louis Post-Dispatch in 1958, then switched to the Chicago Sun-Times in 1962 and moved to Santa Fe, N.M. There he sculpted a bronze statue of his famous "Cavalry Sergeant" cartoon, which is on permanent display in the lobby of the New Mexico

Veterans Memorial Visitors Center and Museum. Mauldin passed away 22 January 2003 at the age of 81.

Enrie Pyle was lost to a machine gunner's bullet 18 April 1945 during an invasion on Ie Shima a Pacific island off Okinawa Honto.

For the 120th Engineers there followed four long months of "hell on earth," where the Battalion performed all tasks assigned to them, at times serving as infantry by night and performing engineering duties by day. When peace came, the 120th had accumulated 511 combat days to their credit. The 120th Engineers' numerous campaigns include: Sicily with assault credit; Naples-Foggia with assault credit; Rome-Arno; Anzio-Solerno; Southern France with assault credit; Rhineland; and Central Europe.

104th ANTI-TANK BATTALION

The National Guard's 104th Anti-tank Battalion, reorganized as the 804th Tank Destroyer Battalion, landed at Oran in East Africa 1 February 1943. While in Africa the Battalion primarily engaged in advanced training in artillery methods and maneuver in coordination with regimental combat teams utilizing their M3 half-tracks that sported updated WWI French 75 mm howitzers.

In January 1944 the 804th was attached to the 88th Infantry Division and sent to Italy where it went into the line in mid-February near Minturo, about 40 miles north of Naples. The mission of the 88th Division was to break the Gustav Line and eventually take Rome. Supporting this mission the 804th was assigned to provide direct fire support to the infantry units to which they had been attached while they, in fact, where themselves highly vulnerable to counter battery fire. By 15 May 1944, the Gustav Line was broken and leading elements of the Battalion pushed north and entered the Eternal City on the 4 June -- stopping for a rest only when they had advanced 30 miles beyond the city.

Included among the infantry units of the 34th Division for whom the 804th provided supporting fire was the famous 442nd Infantry Regiment (Nisei), which became the most decorated US Army unit of World War II.

23 July again found the 804th changing fronts, this time back to the 88th Division and moving into positions southeast of Pisa where the Arno River lay ahead. Attached to the 91st Division on 20 August, the 804th would again be called into the fighting line. By 3 September B company of the 804th had cleared the Arno River and had engaged the enemy north of the crossing until 7 September when the 34th Division took over.

The next great natural defensive line for the retreating enemy was the huge sprawling Apennines mountain range, running from north of Pisa to Rimini and extending 60 miles north to the Po valley. Throughout September and into October, the firing companies of the 804th gave close supporting fire until bad weather began to make operations with their open vehicles extremely difficult. Supply also became a major obstacle because of the ever present mud, which forced the battalion to often depend on pack mules.

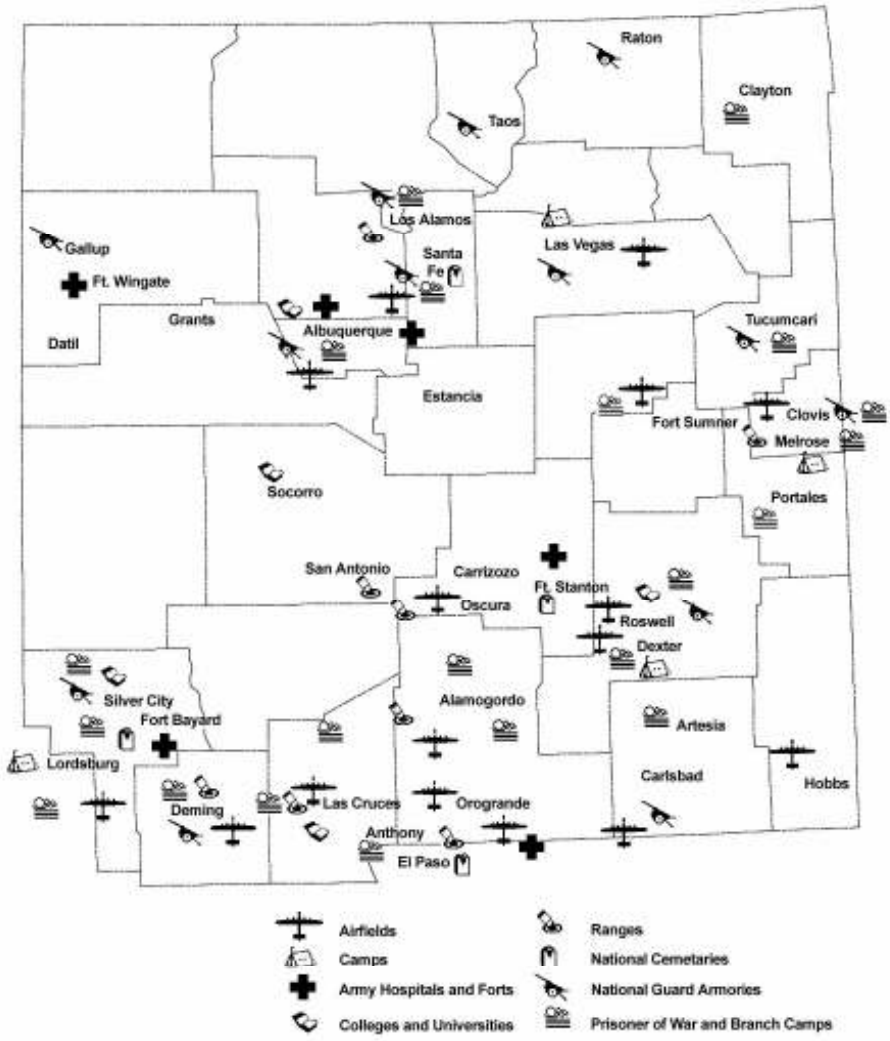
Once the new spring 1945 offensive began, it was more of the same – firing thousands of rounds of high explosives at enemy positions, disrupting lines of communication, knocking out fortifications and harassing the enemy by day and night. For example, it was found that one gun could light up its own target with an illumination round and then take it under effective fire. But, progress was easier. The Po River was crossed by the 26th of April. On the 1st of May the battalion pushed on into Treviso where they met elements of the British 8th Army and closed a trap on thousands of enemy forces to the south. Finally on 5 May 1945, the 3rd platoon of C Company, supporting the 1st Battalion, 339th Infantry reached the Brenner Pass and contacted elements of the 103rd Infantry Division of the 7th Army, which was closing in from the north. Escape for the enemy was then finally cut off and the fighting ceased in Italy.

On 18 July the battalion boarded the "Marine Raven" at Livorno for shipment home where the personnel were discharged at Camp Hood, Texas shortly after arrival.

While in action, men of the battalion were awarded eight Silver Star Medals, three Legions of Merit and sixty Bronze Stars. One hundred and thirty-five were awarded Purple hearts. Thirty of these were awarded posthumously. And the Battalion earned the following campaign credits: Rome-Arno; North Apennines; and Po Valley.

HOME FRONT

On the home front, New Mexicans made an all out commitment to the war effort. The slogan "Food Will Win the War" was nowhere more relevant than in New Mexico, as the rural state more than doubled its agricultural production. Women worked in fields, factories and military installations, and they planted victory gardens and saved precious resources. Likewise the state played a role in the stepped up production of strategic minerals and oil, including uranium from the Ambrosia Lake Mine in northwestern New Mexico.



Military Activities in New Mexico During World War II 1939-1945

As the months passed every wife, mother, sister, brother, father, relative and friends of any man or woman captured by the Japanese, became molded into a powerful voice that continually reminded the federal government of its responsibility to those who became prisoners because of the nation's lack of preparedness and support. Information was leaking out about the atrocities and sub-human treatment that American prisoners of war were receiving in Japanese prison camps in the Pacific. When wives and mothers heard about their sons and husbands who had been taken prisoners, they started calling and writing their Congressmen in an effort to find help or get assistance for their loved ones.

Finally, two mothers whose sons were members of the 200th Coast Artillery and had been captured by the Japanese persuaded other parents and relatives to hold a mass meeting and formed an organization to get relief to the captured boys on Bataan. On 14 April 1942, the *Bataan Relief Organization* (BRO) was formed. Their motto was "We will not let them down."

Incorporated 8 September 1943 the BRO had the goal of bringing whatever aid and comfort possible to the men and women in the Philippines and to disseminate information to relatives of Americans captured by the Japanese. Within months Albuquerque, NM became the national headquarters of the BRO. The BRO would eventually embrace 14 affiliates in eight states and 40 federated groups throughout the United States comprising over one million members and supporters. Radio, telephone and mail services permitted members to keep in touch with each other in a way that had never been possible before.

Listening posts along the west coast and in Albuquerque, N.M. operated 24-hours a day, collecting messages from broadcasts and the relaying them on to the proper families. The BRO also arranged through the Red Cross for a special cablegram rate for messages to American prisoners of the Japanese. A ten-word cable gram could be sent for $6.00 plus a ten percent tax, rather than the standard rate of $15.00. The organization's officers deluged Washington, D.C. officials with mail and personal visits.

Their mission accomplished the National Bataan Relief Officers turned control of the Bataan Relief Organization over to the liberated members of the New Mexico's 200th Coast Artillery Regiment in 1945 at their annual meeting held in Albuquerque, New Mexico. In 1946, the name was changed to *Bataan Veteran's Organization* (BVO).

The first National BVO convention was held May 14, 1948, in Albuquerque. The second was held in Hollywood, California, April 1949. At this convention, it was voted to change the name to *American Ex-Prisoners of War*. The reason for the change was so veterans from the European Theater would realize that they were eligible for membership. By changing the name to American Ex-Prisoners of War, it would welcome all former POW's from any war. There were 800 at the 1949 convention and seven local groups comprised the initial framework of the organization. Those were: The Bataan Veteran's Organization; The Lost Battalion; The Seattle Barbed Wire Club; Orphans of the Pacific; The Dad MacMannis Post; The Southwest Barbed Wire Club; and The Barbed Wire Club of North Carolina.

From that small beginning the BVO/EX-POW grew into a 33,000 member organization that continued to express a powerful voice at the national level concerning the special needs of these disabled veterans.

The heraldic symbols of the AX-POW emblem representing Justice are balanced on swords. Curves at the top of the shield portray the two massive military defeats suffered by the United States Armed Forces in World War II: Bataan and the Belgium Bulge. Later, the Ex-POW motto was adopted: *NON SOLUM ARMIS*, Latin for *"Not by Arms Alone."*

TRANSFORMATION

World War II transformed New Mexico. The Manhattan Project with its successful test of the first atomic bomb, which led to the establishment of Los Alamos National Laboratory, and of Z Division Labs C renamed Sandia

Laboratories in 1948 C together with Kirtland Air Force Base, Holloman Air Force Base, and the White Sands Missile Range, have inextricably linked New Mexicans to the federal government in ways not known before the 1940s.

In many ways, however, it is the ultimate irony. The stability and prosperity of New Mexico has always been dependant on a strong military presence. It simply took the atomic bomb and the global threat of communism to secure that relationship.

The following table briefly summarizes the numbers and types of defense related facilities that were maintained in New Mexico during World War II.

New Mexican Military Facilities of WORLD WAR II	
Major Air Bases	8
Dispersal Bases	5
Bombing and Gunnery Ranges	13
Army Hospitals	4
Camps	2
National Cemeteries	3
POW Camps	3
Branch POW Camps	19
National Guard Armories	11
Colleges & Universities	7
Specialized Military Locations	7