Why did they blow up 100 tons of TNT before the Trinity Test?

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Great question. The 100-ton test was performed before the Trinity test to calibrate instruments prepared to explore the expected larger detonation. One hundred tons of TNT seems like an awful lot of explosive, but I am staggered to remember that the Trinity test yielded about 21,000 tons of TNT equivalent. The 100-ton heap was also salted with small amounts of radioactive materials so that the scientists might be able to study the behavior of the fallout plume anticipated from the Trinity test.

The bizarre part is that the Army appears to have been able to pass off both explosions to the public as ammunition magazine accidents with no injuries.For more information, check out this page on the subject.

Thanks for asking!

Gordon Mcdonough, Museum science evangelist

Occasionally questions are sent to edu-bsm@lanl.gov or are left in our feedback box in the Museum.

We work to provide answers to these questions on our blog and the site where we list our favorite questions and answers.

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