

CHAPTER 6

Displaced: 'The bomb caught us'

The bomb caught us then at Twelve Mile

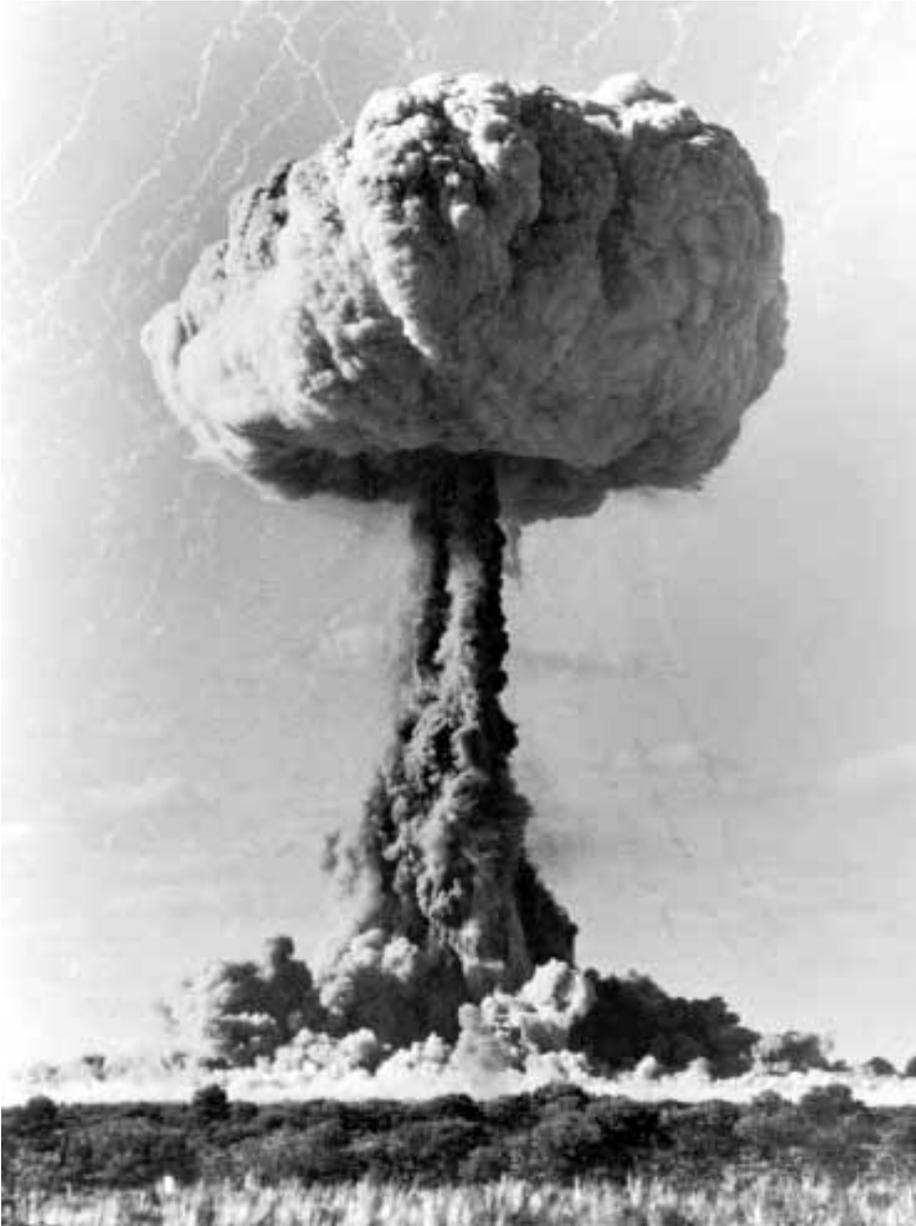
The bomb caught us then. We living there, Twelve Mile all the time. We use to live out there for a long time — go in to Coober Pedy for food and water. Edna and Willie Williams were there and their two little girls, Shirley and Maureen.

The bomb been coming then. And they **knew** that — when the bomb been going to go off. They knew — the womens and mens and all. My husband and Willie and them were going into Coober Pedy all the time to get *mai* — food. They must have heard about the bomb. They didn't want to leave that mine — opals. They heard about the bomb — the mans there talking about it, all the people. But they didn't know which way it was going. They thought nothing was going to happen to us.

And me — I was home there; home all the time. Had my tent there, shed there; tanks, drums of water and the washing things. It was just coming on summer. I'm sitting home, not worrying about what's going on. I was just outside, young and healthy, looking after the little ones, Beaver ...

I siphoned the water out of the drum and I saw this shadow go past and I looked up. What was that shadow?

And it started to look hazy ...



British nuclear testing in Australia

3 October 1952, Monte Bello Islands; 15, 27 October 1953, Emu Junction; 16 May, 19 June 1956, Monte Bello Islands; 27 September (pictured), 4, 11, 22 October 1956, 14, 25 September, 9 October 1957, Maralinga at seven different sites.

'Minor' trials — 1953, 1954, 1956, 1957, 1958, 1959, 1960, 1961, 1963 including the plutonium-239 deposited in the 1959 trials. *Photograph: Department of Defence; NAA*

I'm the one that know this country!

Something's wrong!

They took a long time to come, husband and Willie Williams.

Going for opal, the mans, they seen that bomb. Right the way on that other part — west — they seen 'em. On top of the hill — they looked the bomb way. They didn't know. Smoke laying along, laying across; smoke and bluish smoke.

And the mans came back, 'Something **wrong!**' Headaches, hands over their head. Smoke and bluish smoke rolled over, come over us from *wilurara* — west — the mist was coming from Mabel Creek way. Came in — filled up the hills, the holes — rolled in along the ground — to the tree tops and go around then and follow the creek. Right over the top of us — cloud we can see, like a haze. Could see their **shadows**; it was different to me.

Got the bars, crowbars, you know, shovels, picks.

Pika! — Sick!

'Come on then! We go! What are we staying here for? I think I'll pack up,' he said.

Husband had a truck, an old red Bedford.

Take the children. We had Bernard, Emily and Beaver (Stanley was a baby then at Umeewarra) — take the children to Port Augusta. Molly Brown had a baby out from Coober Pedy, Molly Brown, my sister. She brought the little one to hospital.

Yes, at Twelve Mile, the bomb came right through there — Mabel Creek. My daughter was there then. We were all picking it up, that sickness.



British atomic test — Emu site

In 1952, the surveyor Len Beadell was summoned from Woomera, 480 kilometres away, to the headquarters of the Long Range Weapons establishment in Adelaide to be informed in a meeting of 'top secrecy' that 'it has been decided to detonate an atomic bomb in Australia'. The site was required to be 'in an area roughly three hundred miles from Woomera in a place where radiation would not interfere with the future missile range work'.

This meeting took place almost a year before the official announcement was made. Emu was the name given to the site chosen by Beadell — a 1.5 kilometre long hard clay pan, 280 kilometres north-west of Coober Pedy. Totem I was detonated on October 15, 1953 and it was this explosion that was proved, in the eventual Royal Commission into the British Nuclear Tests, to be the creator of the 'Black Mist' so destructive to the health of the Aboriginal people at Wallatina and other places. Working from the birth dates of the children in the families involved, it was also this explosion which caused the sickness to the Lennons, Williams and others at Twelve Mile and also to those at Mabel Creek.

Photograph: Joe Kennedy; CPHS