Luis W. Alvarez by Corinn Codye

In 1939, World War II broke out in Europe. In 1940, [Luis] Alvarez joined a group of scientists who were designing a way to guide airplanes through fog or darkness. Alvarez and his group built a radar system called Ground-Controlled Approach, or GCA. In this system, a radio signal bounces off a lost plane and back to the sender of a signal. Then a flight controller on the ground can guide the plane safely to the ground.

Later during the war, Alvarez worked in Los Alamos, New Mexico, on a secret project for the government. Nuclear scientists there were searching for a way to make a powerful new weapon, the atom bomb.

It was a tricky job. The radiation given off by the atoms in such a bomb is deadly to living things. Also, accidental explosion would cause a terrible disaster. The project to build the bomb was a top-secret race, because the first country to build an atom bomb would have the power to win the war.

(Excerpted from Steck-Vaughn Connections: Reading & Literature, page 93)