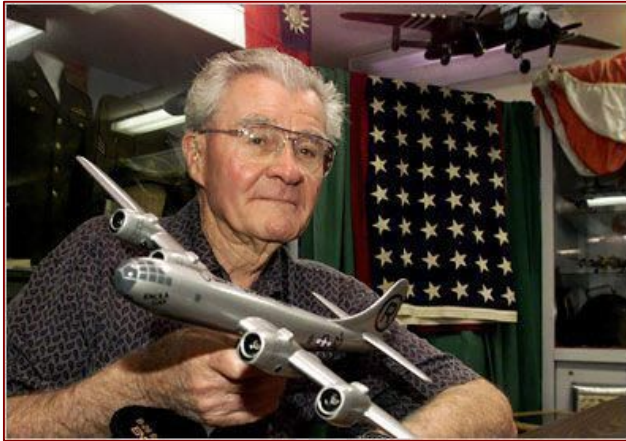


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PAUL W. TIBBETS JR., PILOT OF ENOLA GAY, DIES AT 92

By [RICHARD GOLDSTEIN](#)

Brig. Gen. Paul W. Tibbets Jr., the commander and pilot of the Enola Gay, the B-29 Superfortress that dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima in the final days of World War II, died today at his home in Columbus, Ohio. He was 92.



His death was announced by a friend, Gerry Newhouse, who said General Tibbets had been in decline with a variety of ailments. Mr. Newhouse said General Tibbets had requested that there be no funeral or headstone, fearing it would give his detractors a place to protest.

In the hours before dawn on Aug. 6, 1945, the Enola Gay lifted off from the island of Tinian carrying a uranium atomic bomb assembled under extraordinary secrecy in the vast

endeavor known as the Manhattan Project.

Six and a half hours later, under clear skies, then-Colonel Tibbets, of the Army Air Forces, guided the four-engine plane he had named in honor of his mother toward the bomb's aiming point, the T-shaped Aioi Bridge in the center of Hiroshima, the site of an important Japanese army headquarters.

At 8:15 a.m. local time, the bomb known to its creators as Little Boy dropped free at an altitude of 31,000 feet. Forty-three seconds later, at 1,890 feet above ground zero, it exploded in a nuclear inferno that left tens of thousands dead and dying and turned much of Hiroshima, a city of some 250,000 at the time, into a scorched ruin.

Colonel Tibbets executed a well-rehearsed diving turn to avoid the blast effect.

In his memoir "The Tibbets Story," he told of "the awesome sight that met our eyes as we turned for a heading that would take us alongside the burning, devastated city."

"The giant purple mushroom, which the tail-gunner had described, had already risen to a height of 45,000 feet, 3 miles above our own altitude, and was still boiling upward like something terribly alive," he remembered.

Three days later, an even more powerful atomic bomb — a plutonium device — was dropped on Nagasaki from a B-29 flown by Maj. Charles W. Sweeney.

On Aug. 15, Japan surrendered, bringing World War II to an end.

The crews who flew the atomic strikes were seen by Americans as saviors who had averted the huge casualties that were expected to result from an invasion of Japan. But questions were eventually raised concerning the morality of atomic warfare and the need for the Truman administration to drop the bomb in order to secure Japan's surrender.

General Tibbets never wavered in defense of his mission.

“I was anxious to do it,” he told an interviewer for the documentary “The Men Who Brought the Dawn,” marking the 50th anniversary of the Hiroshima bombing. “I wanted to do everything that I could to subdue Japan. I wanted to kill the bastards. That was the attitude of the United States in those years.” “I have been convinced that we saved more lives than we took,” he said, referring to both American and Japanese casualties from an invasion of Japan. “It would have been morally wrong if we’d have had that weapon and not used it and let a million more people die.”

Paul Warfield Tibbets Jr. was born on Feb. 23, 1915, in Quincy, Ill. His father was a salesman in a family grocery business. His mother, the former Enola Gay Haggard, grew up on an Iowa farm and was named for a character in a novel her father was reading shortly before she was born.

The family moved to Miami, and at age 12 Paul Tibbets took a ride with a barnstorming pilot and dropped Baby Ruth candy bars on Hialeah race track in a promotional stunt for the Curtiss Candy Company. He was thrilled by flight, and though his father wanted him to be a doctor, his mother encouraged him to pursue his dream.

After attending the [University of Florida](#) and [University of Cincinnati](#), he joined the Army Air Corps in 1937.

On Aug. 17, 1942, he led a dozen B-17 Flying Fortresses on the first daylight raid by an American squadron on German-occupied Europe, bombing railroad marshaling yards in the French city of Rouen. He flew Gen. [Dwight D. Eisenhower](#) to Gibraltar in November 1942 en route to the launching of Operation Torch, the invasion of North Africa, and participated in the first bombing missions of that campaign.

After returning to the United States to test the newly developed B-29, the first intercontinental bomber, he was told in September 1944 of the most closely held secret of the war: scientists were working to harness the power of atomic energy to create a bomb of such destruction that it could end the war.

He was ordered to find the best pilots, navigators, bombardiers and supporting crewmen and mold them into a unit that would deliver that bomb from a B-29.

In his memoir “Now It Can Be Told,” Lt. Gen. Leslie R. Groves Jr., who oversaw the Manhattan Project, said that Colonel Tibbets had been selected to train the crews because “he was a superb pilot of heavy planes, with years of military flying experience, and was probably as familiar with the B-29 as anyone in the service.”

He took command of the newly created 509th Composite Group, a unit of 1,800 men who trained amid extraordinary security at Wendover Field in Utah.

In the summer of 1945, Colonel Tibbets oversaw his unit’s transfer for additional training on Tinian in the Northern Marianas. On July 16, an atomic bomb was successfully tested in the New Mexico desert, and when Japan ignored a surrender demand issued at the Potsdam Conference, Colonel Tibbets completed final preparations to drop a uranium bomb.

The Enola Gay, carrying a crew of 12, carried out a flawless mission, delivering the bomb on time, almost precisely on target and with no opposition from Japanese fighters. When the plane returned to Tinian, Gen. Carl Spaatz, the commander of the Strategic Air Forces in the Pacific, presented Colonel Tibbets with the Distinguished Service Cross, the Army Air Forces’ highest award for valor after the Medal of Honor.

Remaining in the military after the war, he served with the Strategic Air Command, the nation's nuclear bombing force, and became a one-star general. After retiring in 1966, he was president of Executive Jet Aviation, an air-taxi company in Columbus, Ohio.

His marriage to the former Lucy Wingate ended in divorce in 1955. Survivors include his wife, the former Andrea Quattrehomme, two sons from his first marriage, Paul III and Gene, and a grandson, Col. Paul Tibbets IV. General Tibbets's wartime experiences were dramatized in the 1952 MGM movie "Above and Beyond," in which he was portrayed by Robert Taylor.

As the years passed, he became a symbolic figure in the controversy over use of the atomic bomb.

While he was deputy chief of the United States military supply mission in India in 1965, a pro-Communist newspaper denounced him as "the world's greatest killer." In 1976, he drew a protest from Hiroshima's mayor, Takeshi Araki, when he flew a B-29 in a simulation of the Hiroshima bombing at an air show in Texas.

In 1995, the Enola Gay's forward fuselage and some other parts of the plane were displayed at the Smithsonian's [National Air and Space Museum](#) in Washington.

Veterans' groups and some members of Congress denounced a proposed text for the exhibition, contending it portrayed the Japanese as victims and the Americans as vengeful. Their protest resulted in the resignation of the museum's director, Dr. Martin Harwit, and the withdrawal of almost all material in the exhibition providing visitors with historical background. General Tibbets's plane — the name Enola Gay freshly repainted — was left to speak for itself.

In December 2003, the Enola Gay found another home. Fully restored and completely assembled, it went on display at the newly opened Smithsonian air museum branch outside Dulles Airport in Virginia.

The previous spring, General Tibbets visited the Virginia Aviation Museum in Richmond. "There is no morality in war," The Virginian-Pilot quoted him as saying then. "A way must be found to eliminate war as a means of settling quarrels between nations."

At the same time, General Tibbets expressed no regrets over his role in the launching of atomic warfare. "I viewed my mission as one to save lives," he said. "I didn't bomb Pearl Harbor. I didn't start the war, but I was going to finish it."

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